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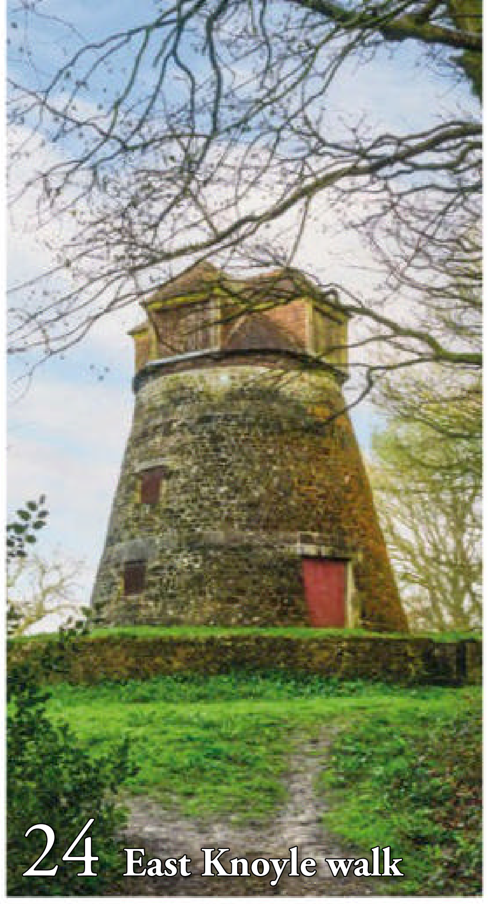
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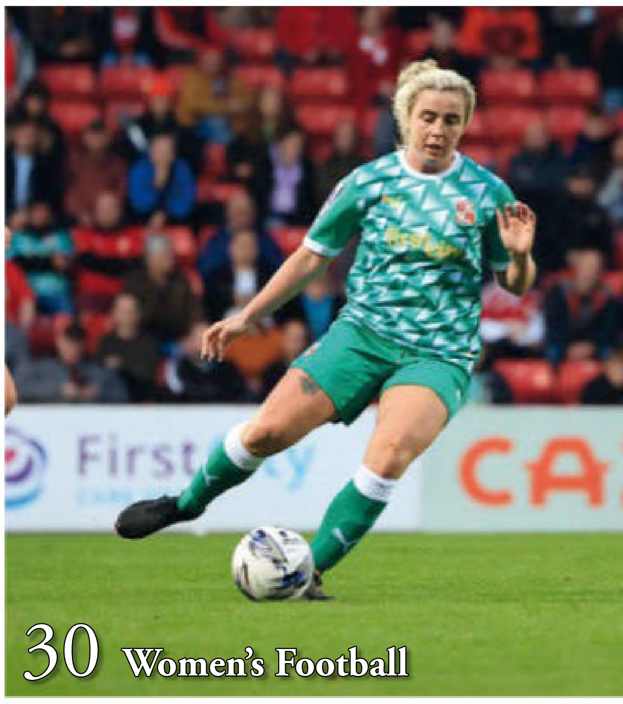
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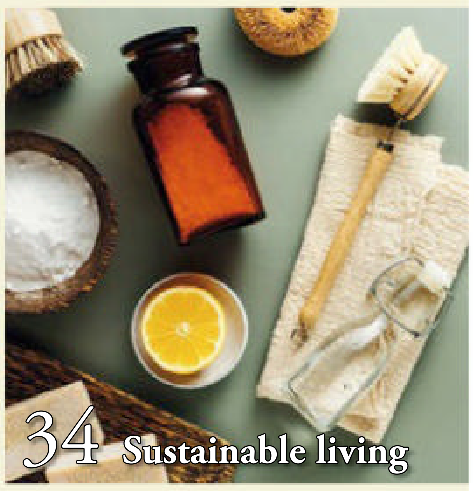
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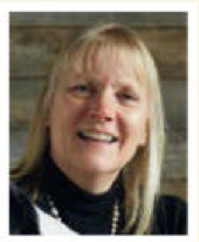
Man's best friend needs our support



As Georgie Green welcomes a new rescue dog into her home, she says now more than ever lonely dogs need our help.

WHEN OUR lovely old dog died back in May, we always knew we would welcome another dog into our home again when the time was right.

On December 22 we were driving to Bath and had only got as far as Warminster when my daughter decided to fill in a Dachshund Rescue application form.

I thought there would be a bit of a wait before they contacted us.

> 'Rescue charities are left to pick up the pieces'

By Boxing Day, we received a call and a lady from the charity explained they urgently needed to rehome a seven-month-old wire-haired dog whose elderly owner had sadly died over Christmas.

It was suddenly all systems go.

The form itself was pretty comprehensive but the lady asked a series of questions, I then sent images of our house and garden for approval (we couldn't have an on-site inspection as both my daughter and I had gone down with the dreaded flu bug). The regional representative for the charity called our two referees in order to check that we would make suitable owners.

Once we were given the go-ahead, I met with the charity representative who had picked him up from Liverpool and so young Reuben a rather cheeky pup has joined our family.

The process to re-home him was thorough and efficient. The team at Dachshund Rescue are a well organised machine.

We have been called by three different people to check how things are going and there is an online support network for people who have rescued dachshunds.

If only this system and level of support was out there for all potential dog or pet owners.

On page 26 we are featuring the current crisis facing the Dogs Trust charity, focusing on how they are coping here in Wiltshire and how they are appealing for support as their centres across the country are receiving more dogs than ever before.

Some pets victims of the current financial situation and others who were purchased during lockdown and whose owners can no longer give them the time and commitment they need.

All our dogs have come from rescue centres, including the Dogs Trust and the RSPCA.

When you adopt from these charities, they carry out thorough checks and offer continued advice and support. Unfortunately, this is not always the case when buying a pet from a breeder – there are wonderful caring people who breed dogs and there are others who see it as a way of making money and have no care about the future of the pet they are selling.

Looking at some of the rescue sites online it is horrifying the number of dogs that have been abandoned from unscrupulous breeders and puppy farms.

Sadly, some people like the look of a dog and having done little or no homework about the breed can end up with all sorts of problems and issues. The rescue charities are then left to pick up the pieces when a dog is taken into their centre through no fault of its own.

There are lots of ways to help out without having to commit to re-homing a dog.

The Dogs Trust is always on the lookout for foster carers, this allows a dog who cannot cope with kennel life to live with a family until a new home can be found.

They also welcome support from volunteers who would like to help out with dog walking and it's a perfect way to get out in the fresh air and enjoy a bit of exercise with a willing canine companion.

As for our young chap, he has well and truly settled in and is thoroughly enjoying walks across the Wiltshire countryside and meeting and greeting everyone and everything with sheer joy and enthusiasm. We are so glad that we filled in that form.

It's going to be a long hard winter

Cost of Living Crisis Appeal 2022

Help us support local people who will be facing immense hardship

Many people across Wiltshire and Swindon are in for an anxious, challenging winter in the face of escalating rent, food and energy prices – forcing them to skip meals to feed their children or go without heating.

In response to this Wiltshire Community Foundation has launched a Cost of Living Crisis Appeal to support grassroots groups and charities helping families and individuals - whether that be through food, money advice, assistance with fuel bills or providing somewhere warm for them to go. But we need your support to do this.

We know there is additional pressure on all our finances this year but if you are in a position to be able to pass on some of your Winter Fuel Allowance, Energy Bill Support Grant or just wish to donate we can redirect it to where it is needed most, helping to support vulnerable local people at a time of crisis.

You can donate by calling 01380 738989, using the QR code below or at localgiving.org/appeal/CostofLiving/

We will be hugely appreciative of any amount you feel able to give - thank you.

Wiltshire
Community
Foundation

Sandcliff House 21 Northgate Street, Devizes,
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AROUND THE COUNTY

Town's king is in for a penny

A rare coin featuring the crowned head of Malmesbury's King Athelstan and proclaiming him "the King of all Britain" is on display at the Athelstan Museum in the town after being bought at auction.

The coin, a penny which was struck in Wallingford, after Athelstan's decisive victory over the Vikings in 937, was spotted by volunteer and trustee Jonathan Tucker coming up for sale. He gained permission to bid for it and secured it for the museum.

"When I started volunteering at the museum, I realised that we didn't have any exhibit which was contemporaneous to the life of Athelstan, especially when he became King and when Malmesbury was his capital. We had later items but nothing from his lifetime or his reign from 924 to 939.

"The museum is delighted to have acquired an object with a direct link to this key figure for Malmesbury's history and after whom our museum is named. It is particularly pleasing to have one with his image."

- *The coin will be on display from late January, more details at athelstanmuseum.org.uk*

The Youth Adventure Trust is challenging people to get outdoors and active over the February half term – from Saturday 11 to Sunday 26 February and at the same time help raise funds for the charity.

Trust's outdoor fun challenge

Swindon-based Youth Adventure Trust, which works all over the county, is urging families to get their children outdoors and help raise funds by taking on its Virtual Resilience Challenge during the February half-term.

Families can run, ride, ramble, ski, scoot or swim their way to 25km, 65km or 100km at their own pace, spread over the week or all in one go. The challenge comes after a survey revealed that young people spend less time outdoors than prison inmates.

Each participant will be aiming to raise funds to match the kilometres they will cover. Funds raised will help children the charity supports to get outside and start to re-build their resilience and confidence to face the challenges in their lives.

- *More details at https://register.enthuse.com/ps/event/VirtualResilienceChallenge2023 or at youthadventuretrust.org.uk*

Charity, business and community stalwarts honoured

King Charles' first New Year Honours list has brought awards for people from all over Wiltshire.

There was a CBE for Madelaine Ponsonby, the Countess of Bessborough, OBE for services to art and art education and to Salisbury Cathedral. The countess, from Salisbury, was a founder of the New Art Centre in London and Roche Court Sculpture Garden, where she remains a trustee.

Wiltshire councillor Helen Belcher from Corsham received an OBE for services to the transgender community in her role as a trustee for Trans Media Watch.

John Churchill and Toby Sutton from Melksham and Warminster, who are co-founders of Scanning Pens Ltd, received OBEs for services to international trade and to the dyslexia and special educational needs and disabilities community.

James Scott, from Pewsey, who is a director of Forest Carbon, was awarded an OBE for services to forestry and to the environment in Scotland.

There were also OBEs for Rachel Hick from Salisbury, who is deputy head of the Ministry of Defence finance department, for services to defence, Elizabeth Jackson of Swindon for services to the space sector in her role as head of space exploration at the UK Space Agency, Catherine Spencer of Pewsey for services to seafarers in her role as CEO of The Seafarers Charity and Professor Geoffrey Till of Devizes for services to defence as professor emeritus of King's College, London, and the US Naval War College.

There was an MBE for Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership chief executive Paddy Bradley, of Salisbury, for services to the local economy and community.

David Bickers from Bradford on Avon received an MBE for services to people with disabilities as co-founder and chief executive of The Douglas Bader Foundation.

There were also MBEs for Meryl Hayward of Swindon for services to heritage as director of corporate services at Historic England and Helen Yeadon of Marlborough, co-founder and chief executive of the Greatwood Horse Charity, for services to disadvantaged young people and retired racehorses.

Sarah Brewis from Calne, who is headteacher at Woodborough Church of England Primary School in Pewsey, was awarded the British Empire Medal for services to primary education.

Polly Cox of Great Bedwyn also received a BEM for services to the community in Shalbourne, as did Nicholas Cross, an instructor for West Wiltshire Sailing Association, for services to young people and to charity, 10th Chippenham Scout Group leader Barbara King for services to young people in Wiltshire and Juliette Pearson of Corsham for services to defence and the community in her role as head of digital academy services at the Ministry of Defence.

Nigel Linacre, co-founder and chair of the Board of Trustees of Chippenham water charity WellBoring, was also awarded the British Empire Medal.

Derek James, deputy chief fire officer for Dorset and Wiltshire, received the King's Fire Service Medal.

Explorer David Hempleman-Adams, who lives in Lacock, became the first person to receive Polar Medals from two different monarchs when King Charles awarded him a second clasp for his dedication to the advancement of knowledge and understanding of both the Arctic and Antarctic.

The fundraising concert in the chapel at Marlborough College in support of Hope and Homes for Children.

Festive hope for children in peril

A Christmas carol concert in aid of Hope and Homes for Children held at Marlborough College Chapel raised £7,000, say organisers.

The charity, based near Codford, works in locations all over the world to protect children at risk.

A spokesman for The Vale of Pewsey Support Group for Hope and Homes for Children, which organised the concert, said: "This amount will literally transform children's lives. Because of this support, there will be even more children spending Christmas at home surrounded by those who love them this year and for all the years to come.

"Many thanks to everyone who took part for their massive contribution, to our sponsors and of course to the audience who helped to make the evening such a successful event. We hope to see you all again next year."

A roundup of events throughout the month

From classic comedy and live music to bread-making and stories of coughs and colds.

2nd & 23rd

WINTER CONSERVATION TOUR

ARUNDELLS, SALISBURY

Explore behind the scenes at Arundells with curator, Kate Walter. Gain exclusive access during the closed season to learn how they care for the collection.

www.arundells.org

3rd

HOW TO MAKE & BAKE SOURDOUGH

IFORD MANOR, BA15 2BA

This small, hands-on masterclass is perfect for beginners, as well as those wishing to improve their bread-making skills.

www.ifordmanor.co.uk

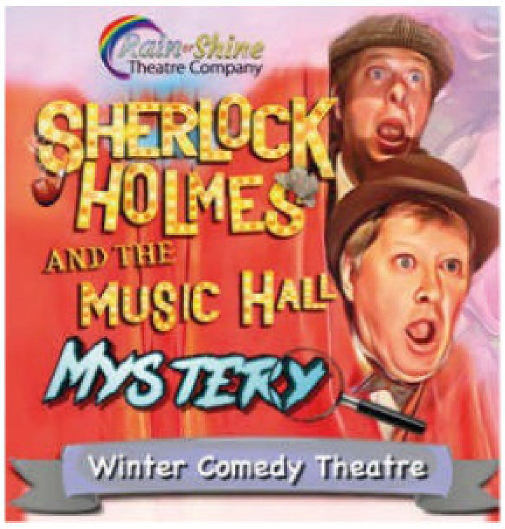
8th

MACIEJ KUŁAKOWSKI

WILTSHIRE MUSIC CENTRE, BRADFORD ON AVON

Expressive French melodies with the award-winning young Polish cellist joined by Swiss pianist Jean-Sélim Abdelmoula.

www.wiltshiremusic.org.uk



5th

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE MUSIC HALL MYSTERY

BRINKWORTH SN15 5AF

Holmes and Watson spring into action to foil a deeply dastardly plot of national importance.

Telephone: 0330 660 0541

Bit.ly/sherlock_brinkworth

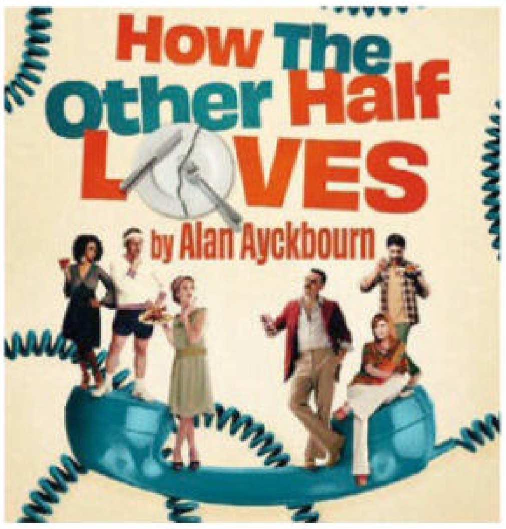
9th Feb - 4th Mar

HOW THE OTHER HALF LOVES BY ALAN AYCKBOURN

SALISBURY PLAYHOUSE

The lives of three couples frantically intertwine in this classic Ayckbourn comedy of confusion and chaos.

www.wiltshirecreative.co.uk


How The Other Half LOVES
by Alan Ayckbourn

10th

AARON AKUGBO - AN EVENING OF TRUMPET MASTERY

WILTSHIRE MUSIC CENTRE, BRADFORD ON AVON

From classical fireworks to musical theatre favourites.

www.wiltshiremusic.org

17th

SAFETY LAST (U) WITH LIVE PIANO SCORE BY MEG MORLEY

POUND ARTS CENTRE, CORSHAM

A season of silent comedy classics. Catch Harold Lloyd's ground-breaking comedy accompanied by live music.

www.poundarts.org.uk

16th

COUGHS AND SNEEZES CORONAVIRUS AND THE COMMON COLD UNIT

SALISBURY MUSEUM – ONLINE

A fascinating look at stories and objects held in the archives at Salisbury District Hospital.

www.salisburymuseum.org.uk

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was warmed and rennet
After breakfast she would return to see if the curd was ready for cutting. If it was, she would use the curd cutters to cut the curd both horizontally and vertically. As she was making Cheddar Cheese, the mixture in the vat would have been heated gradually in order to 'cook the curd'. The mixture was stirred and the curd pieces became firmer. The curd was allowed to sink to the bottom of the vat, and the whey drained directly from the tap of the vat into a channel going out into the yard and flowed down into the whey well, from which it was used to mix with the food for the pigs.
The curd was cut into blocks and put on the curd cooler. It would then be cut, turned and the curd blocks piled on one another to help drainage. It was then milled and salted.
The curd was put into moulds lined with cheese cloth. A wooden follower was put on top of the curd and then the mould put in the press. The pressure was gradually increased over a number of days to eliminate the whey and consolidate the curd. On the third day the cheese would be given a 'cap and bandage' covering and taken to the cheese room.
Chippenham
BOROUGH OF CHIPPENHAM
4
LIST
MELISSA BARNETT
Curator

Melissa Barnett

The head of heritage and museum services at Chippenham Museum sings the praises of the town's rich history.

I HAVE ALWAYS loved Wiltshire. As a child growing up in the Midlands it was a place of secrets and mystery. Memories are scrambled but I recall Brunel's magnificent railway viaduct at Chippenham acting as a gateway to something magical and opening the way to the most interesting part of our journey to the south coast… and to holidays.

First stop was for special Wiltshire Lardy cakes purchased in Chippenham. Then, in no order, Silbury Hill which seemed to rise miraculously at the side of the road, Avebury, Salisbury Plain and the coast. A stop at Stonehenge was saved for special days out although the car always slowed down so we could wave at it. My early fascination with this and the landscape in which it sits led to me studying prehistory and eventually being allowed privileged access to the area during archaeological excavations.

Later, when living in Bristol with my own children, visits to the county involved canal boats, Caen Hill and yet more views of stunning countryside, rare birds, and butterflies.

Today as curator of Chippenham Museum I have got to know a very different part of Wiltshire, a part that to me is Wiltshire's real secret. North Wiltshire' s rolling wooded valleys contrast notably with the open plains to the south of the county. They hide small, picturesque villages whose communities have farmed the fertile land for centuries, built mills beside the fast-flowing rivers and have nurtured artists, writers, and creativity. The etcher Robin Tanner called it a "small, enclosed landscape, ancient deep and sheltered" and it was this area's beauty that originally inspired the great antiquarians Aubrey, Stuckley and Britton.

Chippenham itself has long acted as a focus for this area, a place for people to travel to, gather, exchange goods, ideas, and memories. To many it is a place you might pass through on your way to some of the more well-known tourist attractions and towns. However, it is a surprising and unsung place with beautiful parks and buildings, amazing festivals, much creativity, and a diverse history.

The fertile and protected land on which Chippenham stands is on a horseshoe bend in the river Avon. Its position attracted prehistoric hunters and later farmers, but it was the Saxon kings who put Chippenham on the historic map. They built a royal hunting lodge near the church and in 878 at the Battle of Edington King Alfred famously defeated the Danes and drove the Vikings from Chippenham where they had set up camp.

The town ran a bustling Medieval market and packhorses would bring wool into the town from the villages to be distributed to spinners and weavers and later to the developing cloth mills.

By the Georgian period this had brought such wealth to the town that for a time it was called 'Little Bath'. The many fine Bath Stone buildings seen today were built by clothiers at this time. Stage coaches would bring travellers from London heading to Bath or Bristol and most likely they would stop off at one of Chippenham's many inns, whilst barges on the new canal – now filled in – brought coal and other materials.

The cloth trade eventually declined but Chippenham's fortunes greatly improved when I K Brunel decided to route the Great Western Railway through the town. The railway and the engineering works that developed to support it helped make Chippenham the thriving town it is today.

Chippenham's story through time is displayed at the town museum in the Market Place, in a fine Georgian town house. which is facilitated by the town council and is free to enter.

I have been fortunate to head our team for 12 years assisted by a talented group of volunteers. The museum provides a free service to schools in Chippenham and organises a vibrant programme of exhibitions, walks, talks and special activities.

The museum opened in 1963 in the town's medieval Yelde Hall and has a collection of more than 35,000 catalogued objects and photographs collected from Chippenham and the villages that surround it. We are always adding to the collection and have recently added objects connected to the pandemic, climate change and the Black Lives Matter movement.

We are very proud of our fast-growing reputation as the home of one of the county's finest modern art collections – a vibrant assembly of art inspired by not just north Wiltshire but the people in it. WL

Becky Perry

Becky Perry's warm and outgoing personality flies in the face of the traditional dour image of an undertaker but, as she told Gary Lawrence, it is an advantage in helping families through times of trauma.

MOST PEOPLE have no idea of what career they want at the age of 12 but that was when Becky Perry found her calling and 24 years later nothing has come close to changing her mind.

At the age when little girls are dreaming of marrying a pop star or owning a stables she set her sights on becoming a funeral director. "As long as I can remember I have thought this is what I was meant to do, as weird as that sounds," she says. "It is a bit of a calling I suppose."

We are sitting in a reception room at Chris White Funerals in Wilton, one of four businesses she now oversees (the others are in Salisbury, Mere and Warminster). The neat room, complete with comfy sofas and strategically placed boxes of tissues, is where

Becky and her colleagues meet families at their lowest ebb.

It's these meetings, either here or in the home, where she feels she is most fulfilling this calling – using the diplomacy and respect honed from ever since the first inkling she wanted to do the job.

"Looking back, wanting to do this has probably got something to do with my mum who is a retired palliative care nurse," she says.

"I remember her coming back and telling me a story about a lady who was struggling to die and was really distressed. Mum was massaging her feet and gently reassuring her that her family would be okay and I can still feel the emotion thinking about it all these years later."

She accompanied her mum to patients' funerals and became fascinated with the procedure and ceremony. When a relative who worked at Beaulieu House told her about an undertakers' show – called Hearse of the Year – there, she went along.

> 'I had to prove myself and it took them years to take me seriously'

"I took a picture of everything and spoke to everyone," she recalls. "There was a funeral director from Salisbury there with a vintage hearse and I told him what I wanted to do. He said, 'when you are 18 write to me' so I did and he gave me my first job."

By then she'd had work experience at a funeral directors in Southampton, where she grew up. "I had to arrange my own work experience because the school refused," she recalls. "School tried to put me off the whole idea. A teacher said it was morbid for a woman, you can't do that. I thought 'well I will'."

Her work experience was "incredible", she says. "I was exposed to just enough to know if I was going to be comfortable doing that in the future and I knew within half a day of being there on the first day I wanted to do it."

Even when she began her first job there was some resistance. "Some of the older generation would say 'it's not a job for women, it's too physical, they're too emotional'," she says. "I had to prove myself and it took them years to take me seriously."

Her job is divided into three distinct areas – collecting, looking after and presenting the body, dealing with the family and organising the overseeing the service.

Her firm has the contract with Wiltshire Police for collecting bodies all over the county, which means late night call outs to some distressing scenes – her partner who is a firefighter often goes with her.

Whatever the circumstances, those in her care always get the same level of respect – but sometimes the 'customer' can be familiar. She says: "If I've known them I am more likely to chat away to them while I'm getting them dressed and doing their hair and washing them, more just a gentle conversation. I know they are not there I still look at them as the same person I cared about."

The trickiest part of any funeral is dealing with the families. Experience has taught her that grief comes in wildly varying forms and treading slowly and carefully is the best way of ensuring they get what they want.

"The first thing I do is try to get a feel for where they at, what they need and what questions they will feel comfortable with me asking," she says. "Sometimes they can be quite shut off, angry or tense."

Funerals have become ever more personalised with a bewildering array of services, coffins and even venues. "We don't just hold funerals in churches now," she says. "We recently we did a funeral at the Dog & Gun in Netheravon. The old chap who died practically lived in there so we had his coffin on the pool table.

"If you give people too much choice they can be a bit overwhelmed and then they think 'what do I do for the best? Have I done right by them?'. People need to come away from a funeral and think they've done right by the person who's died and the immediate family."

Getting people to make decisions without rushing them is a painstaking process. "When we arrange a funeral we are effectively arranging

Below: Becky in the office at Wilton.

a wedding in two weeks," says Becky. "Every element of a wedding – food, orders of service, music, flowers – everything you have to do has to be done in two weeks rather than six months, and at a time when you are least able to deal with making choices."

Making sure the day goes without a hitch is just as important but it can be the most rewarding part of the job. "I thrive on a bit of pressure and it gives me a bit of pep in my step because I know that the outcome, if it all goes well, will be so positive for the family," she says.

"Sometimes when we are doing a funeral in the cathedral and I see my boys walking up the aisle I have to try and not smile because inside I'm beaming with pride that they all look smart and it exactly how the family wanted it to look and feel."

However, there is a day that still makes her shudder. "Once, and only ever once, I fell in the grave," she recalls. "I was about 20. It was a really old churchyard and they usually put shoring in to protect the grave but it was so old they couldn't get all the equipment in. I went ahead of the family just to check it and the whole lot collapsed and I went down into it. It was a re-open of an old grave so my foot got stuck in the coffin lid underneath me. The bearers had to pull me out and I was covered in mud. It was pretty traumatic."

Even more traumatic was dealing with Covid – a harrowing period that pushed Becky and her teams to the limit. "We normally have anywhere between 14 and 20 deceased in our care but at one point we had 92," she recalls. "We had to convert all our garages into refrigerated units, it was apocalyptic."

Having to cope with the extra workload and days without proper sleep was only half the story. "Families were really traumatised when they couldn't see their loved ones," says Becky. "We had a man who had seven children and his wife had to choose which ones she took to the funeral because of the limit on numbers.

"We had five calls to one nursing home in the same day and to see the staff's faces was just heartbreaking."

No one was out on the street clapping for undertakers. "It doesn't bother me, you don't do this job for that," says Becky. "It was one of the most challenging times of my career, but I know I made a difference to those families and that's enough for me."

Even almost 30 years in the job one kind of death is still the most difficult. "People say it must be babies and children and yes of course that is sad but suicide is the worst," she says. "I've seen cases spike in the last 10 years and I can't understand why more is not being done. I am seeing it almost monthly.

"It's mostly, but not exclusively, men in their 50s whose lives have reached a difficult point. It feels so preventable and the effect on the families is the most severe. It's the hardest one to deal with and I find it gets harder every year."

Above: Taking care of floral tributes.

Becky's bubbly, open personality belies the sombre image of the old-fashioned undertaker – something she sees as a positive. "People see me in the pub and I'm quite cheerful and outgoing and they respond to that ," she says.

"They find it unusual that I do what I do and am outgoing rather than all demure and quiet. I think I've helped them rethink my role and that fact you can do a sad job but still be happy and cheerful."

She also uses being so approachable to inspire people to talk about death. "There is a generation of people, sort of in their 70s, who are really keen to talk about and plan their funeral but their children aren't because they find it uncomfortable," she says.

"Part of my job and role is making people aware of having that conversation no matter how old you are because, God forbid anything happens, that conversation is of such comfort to that family because they'll know what the person wanted."

The job has shaped her own thinking about life and death too. "I understood from really early on that this job was a gift in the way that it stops you being scared of dying because you have to face it head on, you have to accept you may be dead tomorrow," she says.

"That frees you somehow and makes you really appreciate really small things and how lucky you are. That feeling was there the day I started and I still wake up feeling exactly the same. I remember to be grateful every day." WL

Are your finances in shape for 2023?

AS THE decorations are put away for another year and that resolution to go to the gym more seems a distant memory already, thoughts turn to tax year-end planning for many individuals and businesses.

2022/23 will be a year of mixed fortunes. For some, soaring energy and input prices will see profits squeezed and pressure on the bank account, while for others this will have been a successful and profitable year. Both need to do some careful planning for the future.

Planning ahead

There's never been a more important time for businesses to prepare cashflows for the next 12 to 18 months. Actively planning future cashflow requirements will allow more time to make business decisions. If that means talking to lenders about increasing overdrafts or additional finance, doing this in advance rather than over a panicked phone call will be much appreciated by your bank.

For those with some surplus cash or profits, planning to pay off any loans early could result in significant interest savings as rates rise, but beware of early redemption penalties.

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's Autumn Statement provided some food for thought, particularly when it comes to how businesses pay their employees.

One of the biggest changes was the lowering of the additional rate income tax threshold, from £150,000 to £125,140, with effect from 6 April 2023. This is the point at which the income tax rate goes from 40% to 45%. For an employee already earning above £150,000, this will mean paying an extra £1,243 in tax annually. Anyone receiving a pay rise will end up paying more tax and National Insurance.

Taxing matters

Businesses looking at reducing taxes may want to consider any capital purchases that need to be made. If investing in plant and equipment, the full cost can be offset against your profits, taking advantage of the 100% allowance rates. Thought should, however, go into this. As corporation tax rates are set to rise from 19% to 25% in April, you should have a conversation with your accountant.

Above: PKF Francis Clark's team of accountants specialising in advising rural businesses.

Looking to buy cars? Electric vehicles still represent the best value for businesses, offering more favourable capital allowances, as well as much lower 'benefit in kind' rates for employees.

The year-end dividend has always been a straightforward decision for shareholders. Historically dividends have been a more tax efficient remuneration option than bonuses. However, the combined impact of changes at both the personal and business levels means the effective tax rates for dividends and bonuses are expected to become broadly the same.

This brings in other factors to consider, including the timing of tax payments. Tax on a bonus is paid under Pay As You Earn and so is payable at the time, whereas income tax on a dividend is due at the end of January or July but will impact on payments on account. Many may prefer the simplicity of payment through PAYE.

There may also be advantages of taking a salary or bonus in terms of state benefits and for pension contribution purposes, as well as mortgage or other loan applications.

There are other options, such as salary sacrifice. This is where you agree to a contractually lower salary in exchange for a tax efficient benefit. Typically, pension contributions represent the best option here, as there are also National Insurance savings for both the employee and employer.

Right: Martin Rossiter, partner at PKF Francis Clark.

Pension contributions remain the most tax efficient way for an owner-manager to extract profits from a company, if you don't need the money right now. And capital gains tax rates remain beneficial, so are worth exploring to extract value from the company – perhaps as a sale or as part of a family succession arrangement.

All in all, 2023 will bring a sea change, though the difference in most tax liabilities is likely to end up being fairly small. Having said that, with the cost of living crisis putting a squeeze on everyone's finances, cash may well be king. The key is that any strategy has been thought about and well planned. At PKF Francis Clark, we would be delighted to discuss any of these issues with you.

- *Martin Rossiter is a partner at the Salisbury office of PKF Francis Clark. For more information, email martin.rossiter@pkf-francisclark.co.uk or visit pkf-francisclark.co.uk*

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Shared Ambition

Bringing art to the heart of the county

Through her gallery, Bryony Cox is working to support fellow artists to establish a centre of creativity in Devizes. Simon Heptinstall catches up with her and discovers she is well on her way to achieving her dream.

WATCHING BRYONY Cox deal with customer enquiries, explain the back stories behind artworks, help someone choose that special little something to fit their budget, deal with one of her roster of 80 artists who has just popped their head round the door to say hello… and welcome a *Wiltshire Life* writer who has arrived early to do this interview – and you may be inclined to ask one simple question: How does she do it?

The young Wiltshire artist and owner of White Chalk Gallery in Devizes is just 31 – but already has the calm confident mindset of a mature businesswoman. Bryony's journey from university to gallery is an interesting one.

Following an art foundation course at Trowbridge College Bryony started a Contemporary Craft degree. During the first year of study she suffered a very serious burn injury whilst using an angle grinder to cut through thick steel. She might not have survived but for the quick thinking of a college technician who rushed to help. "He was exceptionally brave," she says. "He really did save me. I look back now and realise how lucky I was."

On recovery she switched to a degree in drawing. "I didn't want the accident to define me, it just prompted a change of direction. I've always loved drawing, for me it is at the heart of everything I do artistically."

Bryony decided to broaden her horizons and take a chance after she graduated when she jumped at the opportunity to volunteer as an art assistant in a school in Sri Lanka. She fell in love with the country and took other artistic freelance work whilst she was there including producing dynamic wall murals for boutique hotels and artwork commissions for various projects, working closely with an interior designer. Bryony used Sri Lanka as a springboard to visit other countries, always armed with a sketchbook and camera: "One day I saw a girl perching on a wall and I knew I needed to draw her to try to capture that one fleeting moment where she was lost

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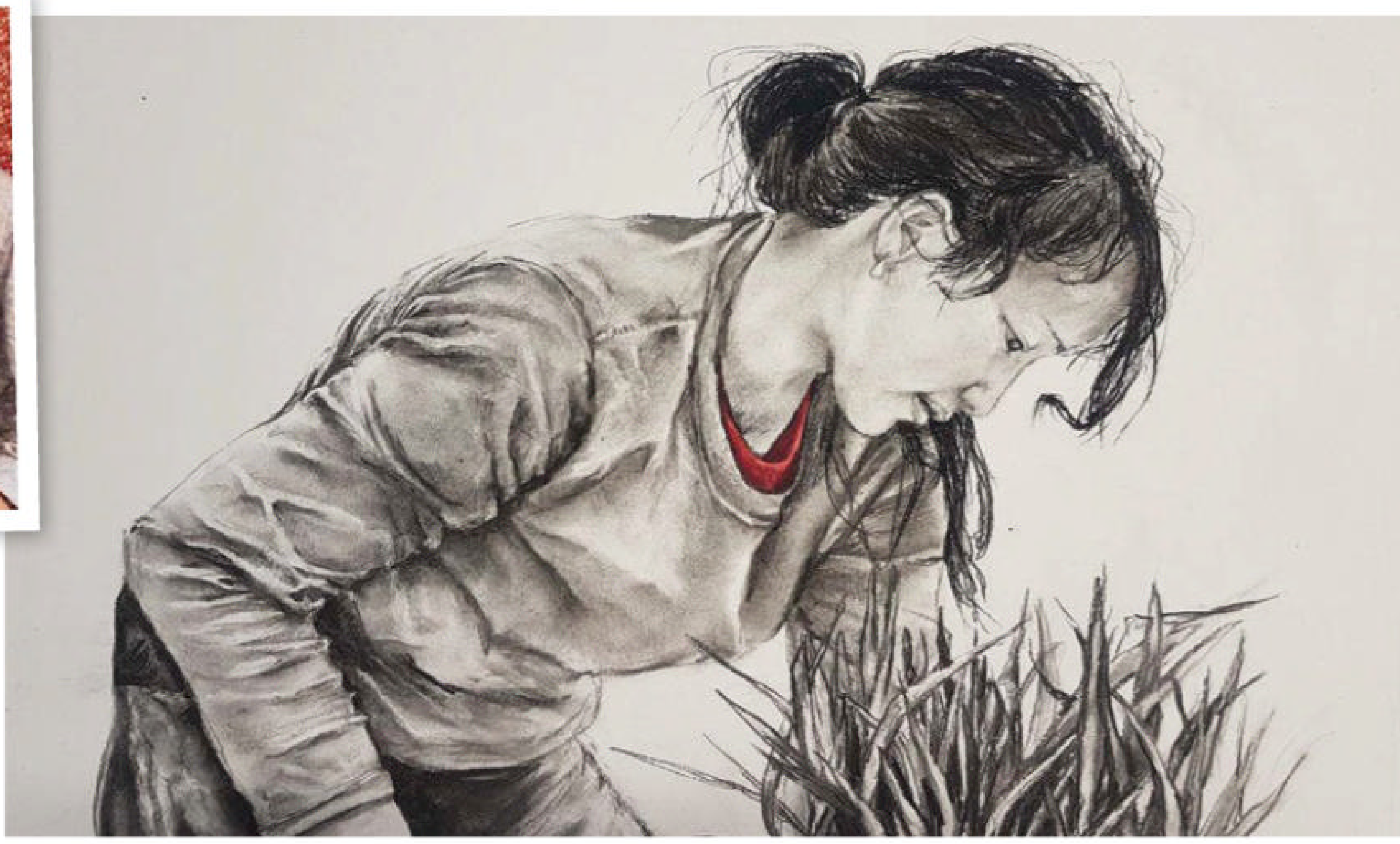
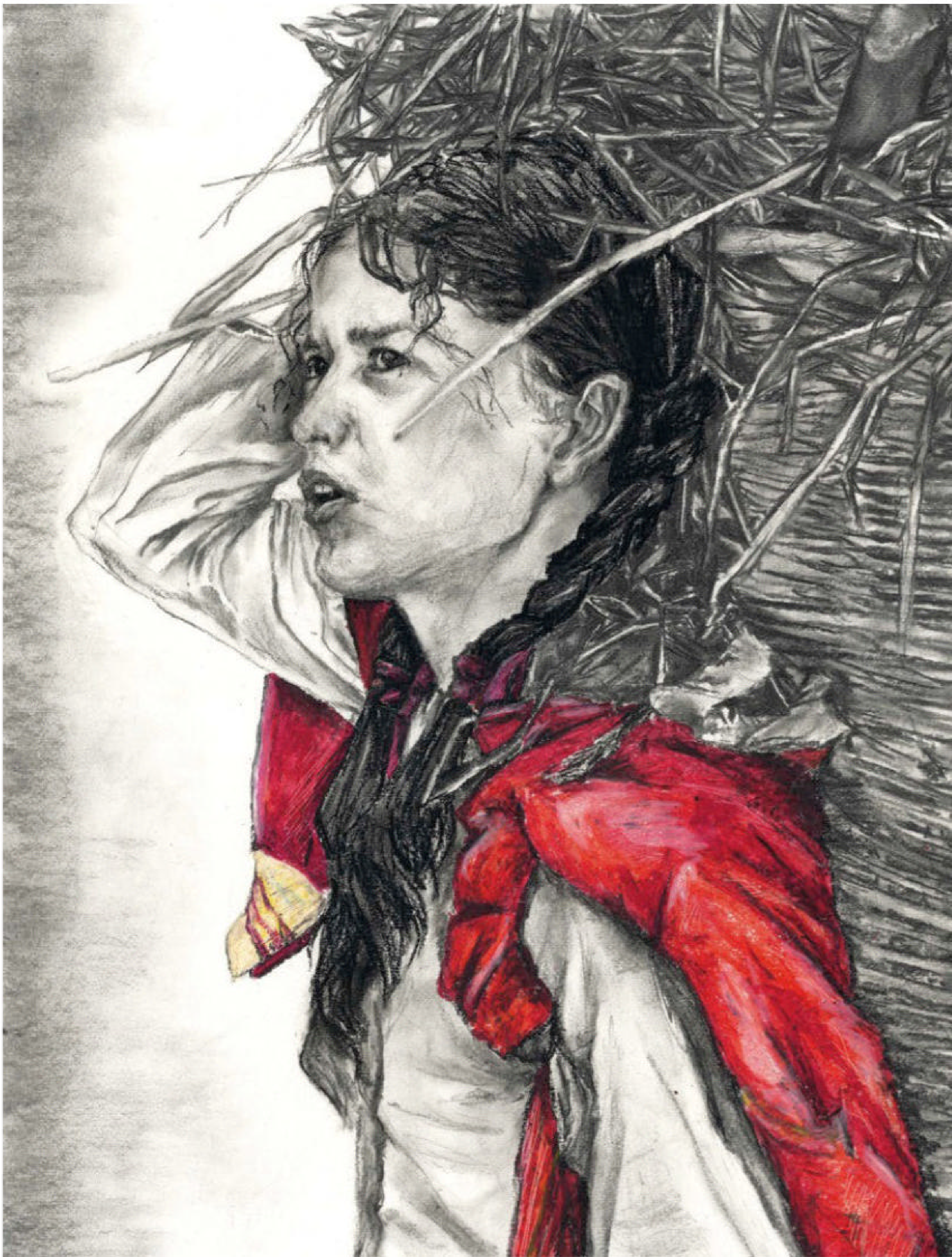
Above: Bryony taking an art lesson in India.

Right: An, the rice paddy girl and Daania. Both mixed media on paper.





in thought. We all as humans share universal emotions and determination of mind no matter what different paths we tread."

Armed with so much rich research and material to draw from Bryony came back to Wiltshire where she dedicated her time to a body of work at her studio in Trowbridge Town Hall. Successful exhibitions followed. Her work spans a range of different mediums. The charcoal work has a rawness to it as she tried to capture a sense of our innate human struggles and her vivid pastel and oil paintings are wonderfully dramatic. Bryony's portraiture work, inspired by the women she met on her travels, has an interesting mix of both black and white and colour.

Bryony had been bought up in Wiltshire at her family home in Little Cheverell. "We've always loved the arts as a family. My grandmother was an artist and I'd put on the old films of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers whilst drawing for hours and hours. I had a very creative upbringing featuring music, drama, and art."

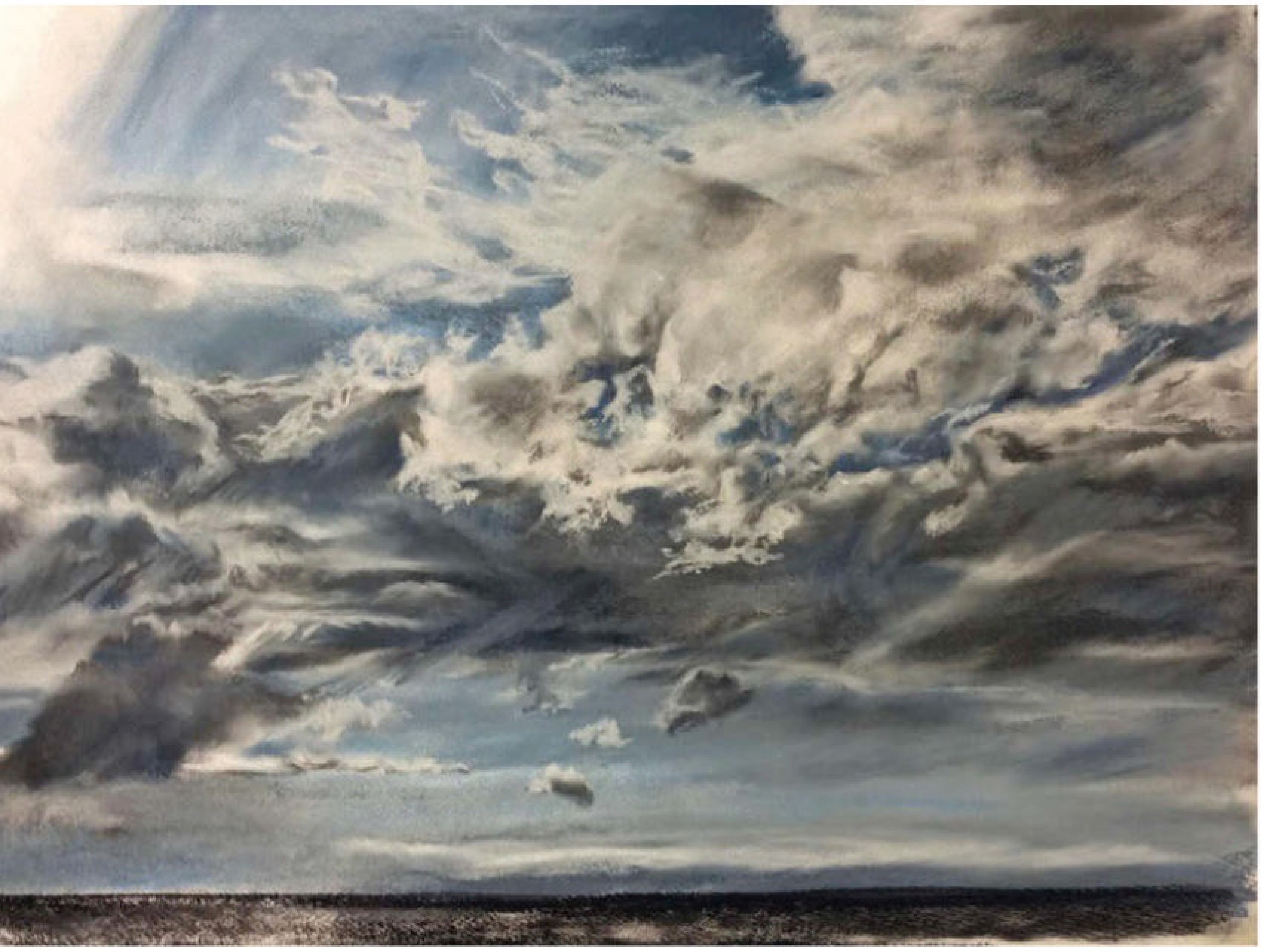
She also had a short residency with John Wragg RA whose absolute dedication to his work, no messing about attitude and invaluable advice she still keeps in mind today.

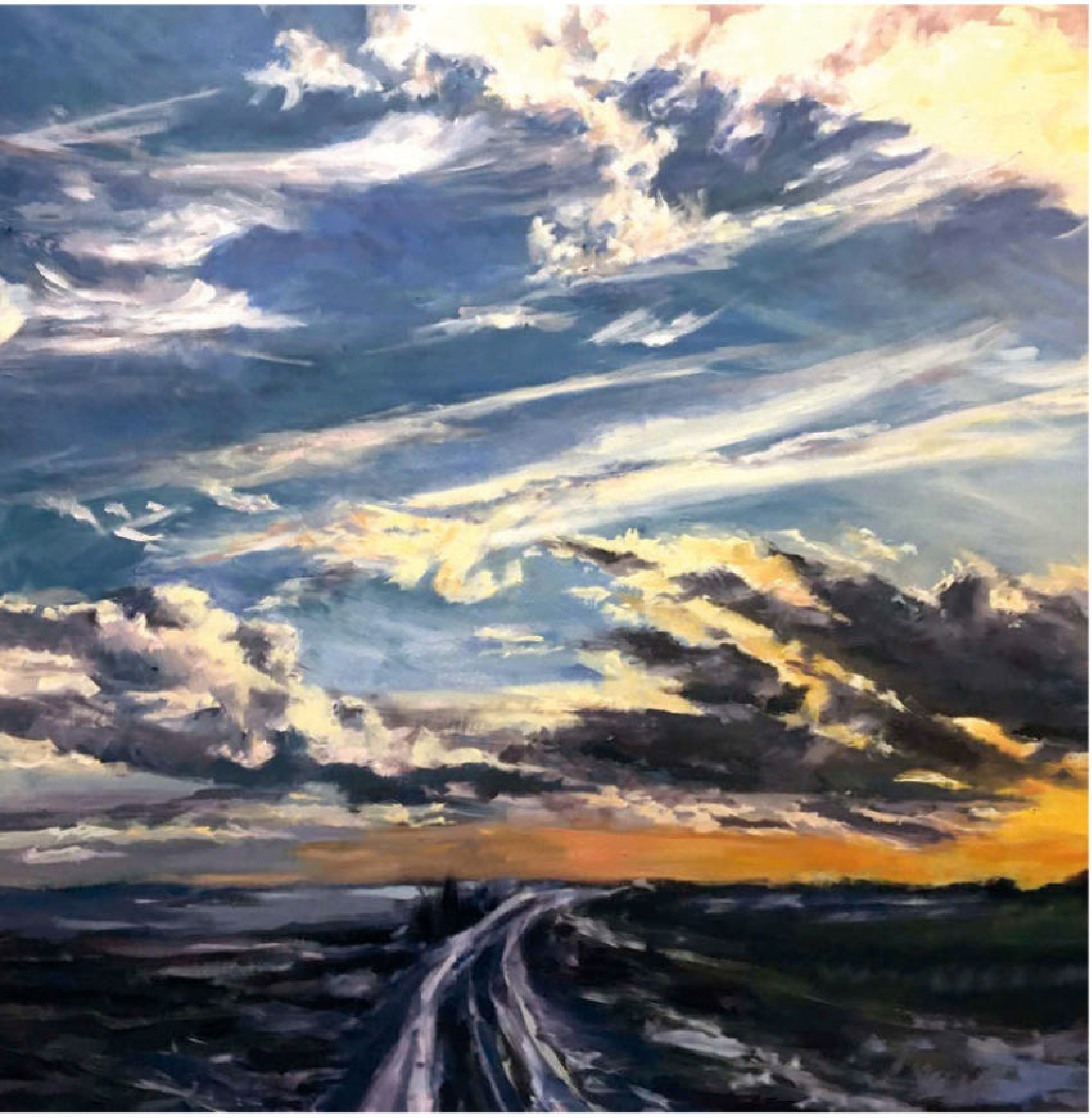
After she studied an MA in London she returned to her roots as the pandemic struck. Her artistic work became more focussed on the Wiltshire landscape and dramatic skies which she had so loved as a child when exploring the countryside round her home.

Bryony began to give more thought to an idea that had taken root some years before – running her own gallery. She felt that her knowledge from both the contemporary craft and drawing degrees along with the entrepreneurial skills she had acquired as a freelancer both abroad and in Wiltshire gave her the tools to make it a reality.

She had her eyes on the charming alleyways of Old Swan Yard in Devizes and when a property became available which suited her vision, she leapt at the opportunity it presented.

"I always wanted to have a gallery. I have developed a strong work ethic over the years and love sharing my passion with others. I'd





Right: A Wisp of White, mixed media on paper.

Below: Swiftly Moving, oil on canvas.

always gone to galleries, open studios and art fairs, noting down the artists and makers that made me excited. The idea of curating a gallery was always in my head."

Today that's why the White Chalk Gallery features a huge range of work, from cards to large abstract landscape paintings. There is a broad spectrum of prices. Wiltshire art featured at the gallery includes the powerful pastel landscapes of Cathy Pearce, from Bromham, and the charming whimsical animal sculptures by Chris Davey at Great Cheverell Pottery. Alongside are artworks from all over the UK. i"I like to represent the rich local art scene as well as bringing in artists and makers from further afield. I aim to display artwork and craft that people have never seen before, celebrating the rich and diverse artists and makers working in the UK today. My net is cast wide and I want people who come here to have a wonderful experience. I curate the gallery and change the stock as often as possible. It's like a jigsaw puzzle arranging pieces so they complement each other, giving customers an idea of how artwork and ceramics could be curated in their own homes."

The gallery has a relaxed atmosphere. "People can just come in and look. It doesn't matter whether they buy or not. Of course, it's useful if they do – but it's important to provide an escape for people to enjoy looking at an array of beautiful handmade objects and artwork.

"I'm here six days a week and I don't pressure people but I'm really passionate about it. Most artists love to share their work so visitors can take something from it, even if they don't buy it."

In fact, Bryony is modest enough to only feature a few of her own pieces: "At the moment there are five of mine but sometimes there are none. I'm just one of the artists – the gallery isn't about me." Although she has recently featured in the artists section of *Vanity Fair*.

White Chalk Gallery is already establishing itself as a thriving business. it is popular with both customers and artists. The draw could in part be that it is very exciting to see so much diverse work all in one place and hear Bryony's extensive knowledge of both the artists and their work.

Bryony seems to have so much energy and positivity. She is currently part of a group of artists who are keen to establish a hub for professional artists in the town with studio spaces available in Devizes. "There has been an influx of people moving to Wiltshire since the lockdown. It's changing fast. Devizes is starting to become something of an artistic hub. I can't reveal everything but there are all sorts of artistic things bubbling away." WL

- *White Chalk Gallery, 8 Old Swan Yard, Devizes*
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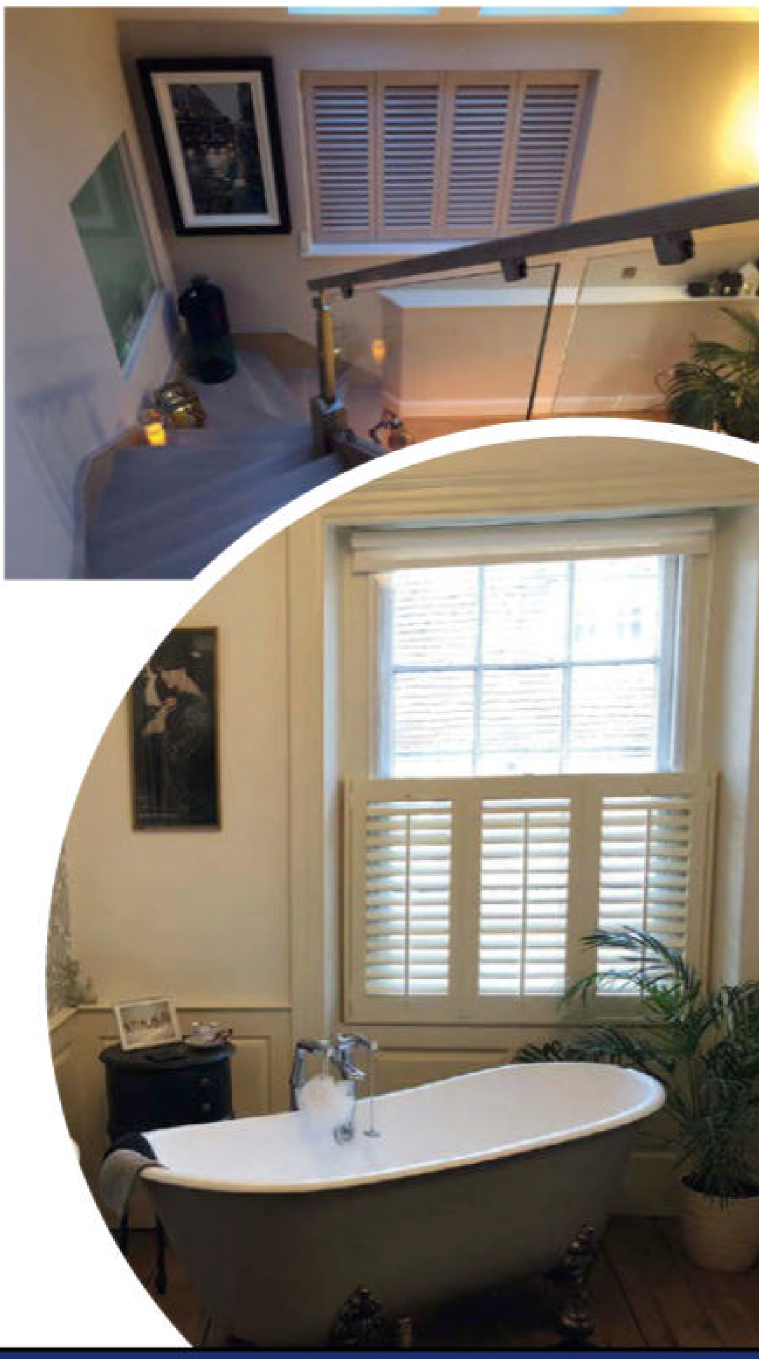

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Grand designs echo through the centuries

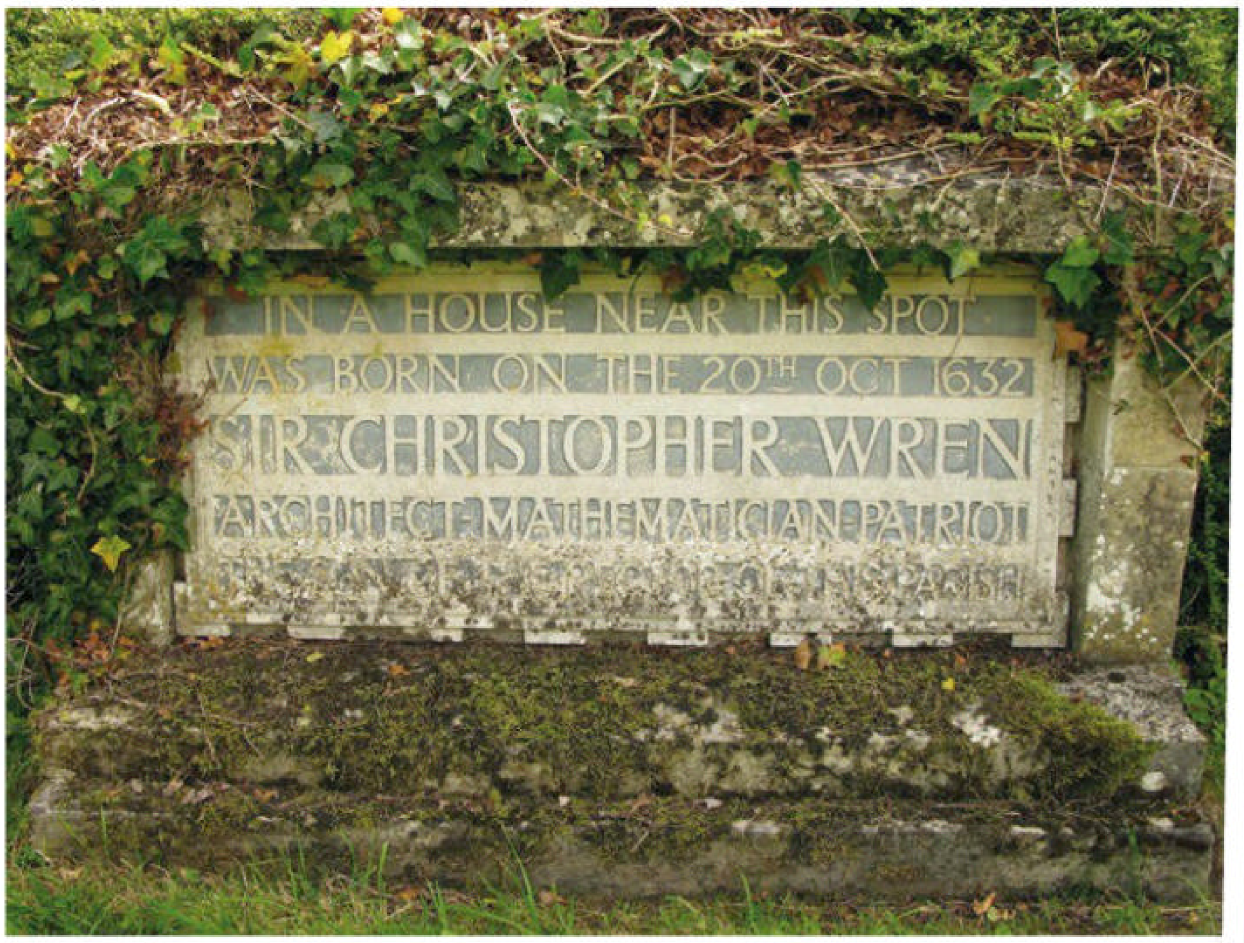
Sir Christopher Wren, who died 300 years ago this month, is one of Wiltshire's most famous sons. His vision shaped the London we know today but, as Margaret Brecknell discovers, it also left a lasting legacy in his home county.

SIR CHRISTOPHER Wren was laid to rest in the grand surroundings of St Paul's Cathedral – the architectural masterpiece for which he is best remembered. The Latin inscription on his memorial famously translates as: "If you seek his monument, look around you."

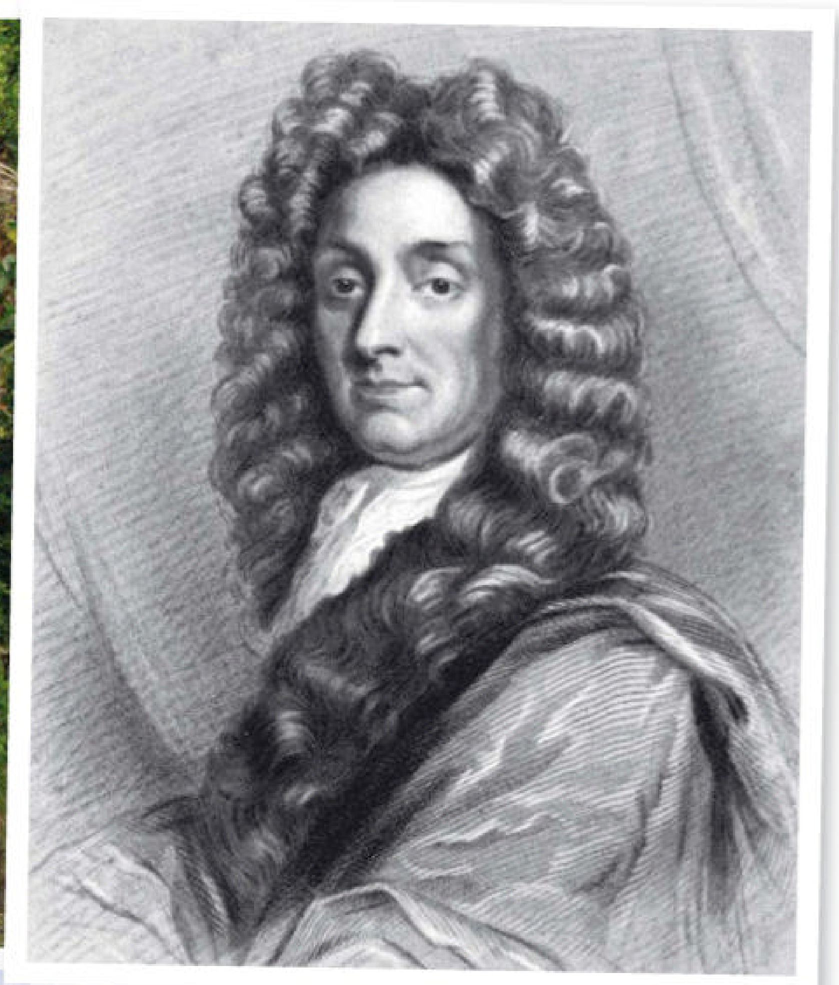
All this seems far removed from the picturesque village of East Knoyle in Wiltshire where Wren started life. His father served as the Rector of there from 1623 until 1646 and the famous architect was born in a cottage on Wise Lane on October 20, 1632. A plaque commemorates the village's most famous son, but the house where he was born no longer exists.

The parish church of St Mary's is famous for its ornate alabaster plaster reliefs featuring famous biblical scenes, which decorate the chancel walls. The designs were the work of Wren's father – also named Christopher – who commissioned them shortly before the start of the English Civil War. They were

Wren's commemorative stone in East Knoyle.


IN A HOUSE NEAR THIS SPOT
WAS BORN ON THE 20TH OCT 1632
SIR CHRISTOPHER WREN
ARCHITECT MATHEMATICIAN PATRIOT

Sir Christopher Wren.



From top: The Old Royal Naval College at Greenwich; The Royal London Hospital in Chelsea; The Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford.

lucky to survive an incident when the rector was confronted in the church by a band of Cromwell's soldiers, who knocked the heads off some of the ornate decorations.

Christopher Wren Junior initially specialised in astronomy after graduating from Oxford University in the early 1650s. At the tender age of just 25 he became Professor of Astronomy at Gresham College in London and four years later was appointed to the prestigious role of Savilian Professor of Astronomy at Oxford University. However his thirst for scientific knowledge extended far beyond one subject and, in a forerunner of what later became the prestigious Royal Society, he met regularly with fellow scientists to exchange ideas.

Wren loved to experiment. He was a prolific inventor, whose creations included a transparent beehive for the study of bees, a pneumatic engine and even a device for writing in the dark (presumably a useful invention in the days before electric lighting).

In 1663 Wren was invited by his paternal uncle to undertake his first architectural project. Matthew Wren had backed the wrong side during the Civil War and was only released from prison following the restoration of King Charles II to the throne. As a gesture of gratitude for his release, he pledged to build a new chapel at his alma mater, Pembroke College, Cambridge. In a classic example of nepotism in its most literal sense he engaged his nephew Christopher as architect.

> ‘It offered him a once in a lifetime opportunity to make his mark’

Soon afterwards Wren received a commission to design the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford. He turned for inspiration to an ancient Roman theatre, cleverly incorporating a roof into the design of the original open-air structure to allow for the vagaries of the English weather. Despite being still relatively inexperienced as an architect, his finished design proved a triumph.

As a sign of his growing reputation Wren was asked to submit suggestions for the renovation of St Paul’s Cathedral. The medieval building, which had originally been completed in 1314, was by the mid-17th century in a serious state of disrepair. In an echo of things to come, the architect came up with a revolutionary idea to replace the existing central tower with a magnificent new central dome. Only a few weeks later, the Great Fire of London swept through the city and destroyed many of its old buildings including much of St Paul’s.

Wren was appointed as one of the three Commissioners of London to oversee the rebuilding of the city and became the principal architect responsible for its churches. The appointment offered him a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make his mark as an architect, but the scale of the task facing him should not be underestimated. No fewer than 87 parish churches had been destroyed in the fire and over the next two to three decades Wren oversaw the reconstruction of 51 of them.

In 1669 he was also appointed Surveyor of the King’s Works, a position which he held for many years. The role was prestigious, but added significantly to Wren’s already immense workload. He now had overall responsibility for the upkeep of all the royal palaces, as well as any new architectural projects commissioned by the crown. Memorable projects in the role included his designs for the Royal Naval College at Greenwich and the Royal Chelsea Hospital.

Such an important position came with a fine property on the prestigious Great Scotland Yard in Westminster, plus a guaranteed income for life. With his financial future settled, Wren married Faith Coghill, whom he had known since late childhood. Sadly, she died only six years later and his subsequent marriage to his second wife, Jane Fitzwilliam, was similarly short-lived, lasting only three years before her death in 1680. He never remarried.

It is a wonder that Wren ever found time for his greatest architectural project of all, St Paul’s Cathedral. He was heavily involved in the consultation process for the new St Paul’s from its early stages and submitted no less than three designs. In November 1673, a royal warrant was finally issued for the construction of the new cathedral and Wren was officially appointed as architect.

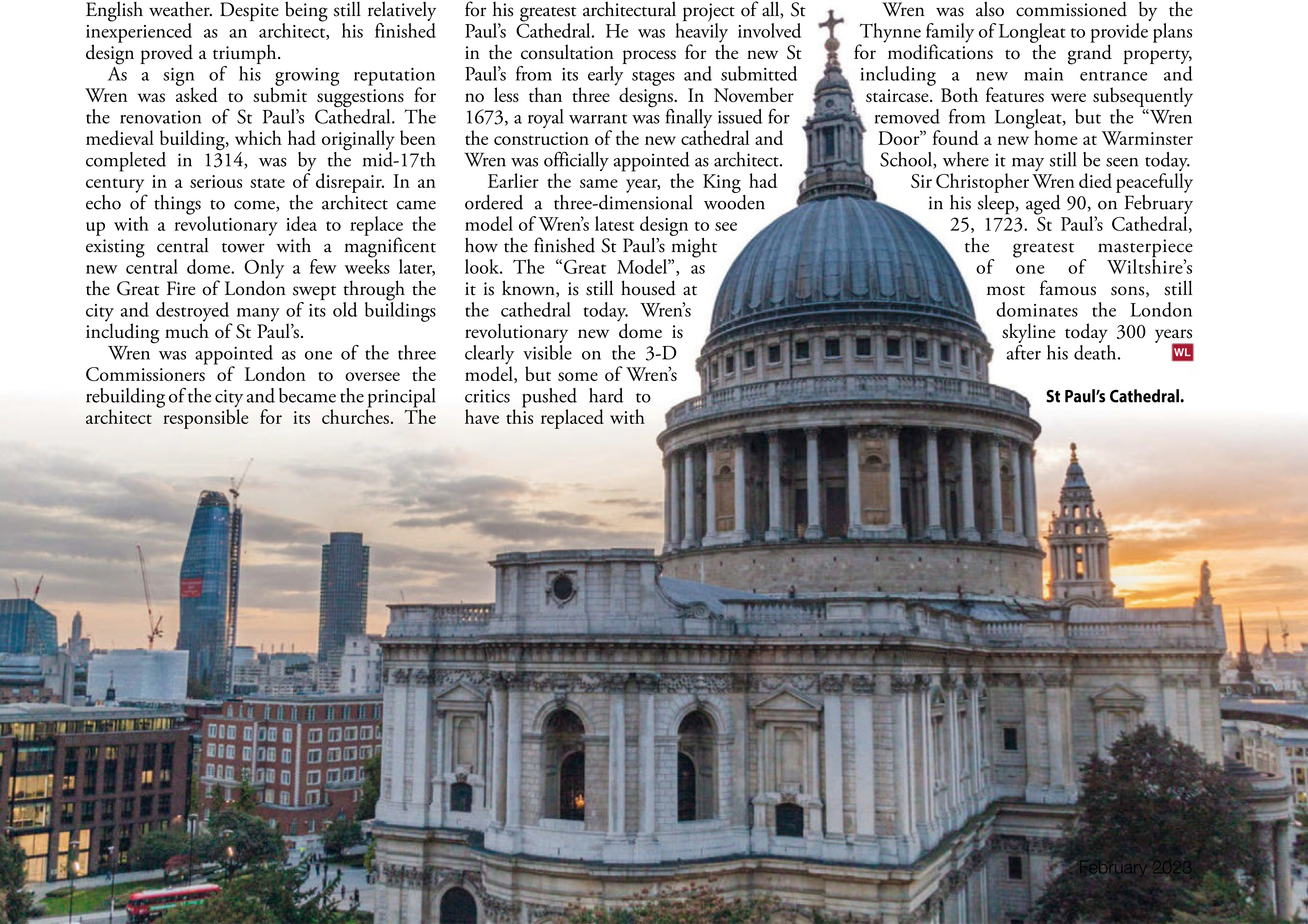
Earlier the same year, the King had ordered a three-dimensional wooden model of Wren’s latest design to see how the finished St Paul’s might look. The “Great Model”, as it is known, is still housed at the cathedral today. Wren’s revolutionary new dome is clearly visible on the 3-D model, but some of Wren’s critics pushed hard to have this replaced with a more traditional spire. In the end, history shows that Wren’s design prevailed, helped by a clause in the official royal warrant which allowed for “variations, rather ornamental than essential”.

The first stone in the new St Paul’s Cathedral was finally laid in June 1675, nearly ten years after the Great Fire of London. His most famous building took 35 years to complete, spanning the reigns of five monarchs. Although this sounds like a long time, construction was completed relatively quickly for such a large and complex structure. The iconic dome was one of the last features to be finished.

Despite his heavy workload, Wren never forgot his native county. In 1668, he was invited by the Bishop of Salisbury to conduct an architectural survey of Salisbury Cathedral. Wren’s contemporary, John Aubrey, remarked dismissively of this survey that “he was at least a week about it, and a curious discourse it was: it was not above two sheets”. However, Wren made one vital discovery. The cathedral’s famous spire was not entirely straight and had shifted by as much as 30 inches from its correct vertical position. On Wren’s recommendation, iron bands were inserted to strengthen the spire’s interior, an intervention which has served the cathedral well to this day.

Wren was also commissioned by the Thynne family of Longleat to provide plans for modifications to the grand property, including a new main entrance and staircase. Both features were subsequently removed from Longleat, but the “Wren Door” found a new home at Warminster School, where it may still be seen today.

Sir Christopher Wren died peacefully in his sleep, aged 90, on February 25, 1723. St Paul’s Cathedral, the greatest masterpiece of one of Wiltshire’s most famous sons, still dominates the London skyline today 300 years after his death. WL



St Paul’s Cathedral.

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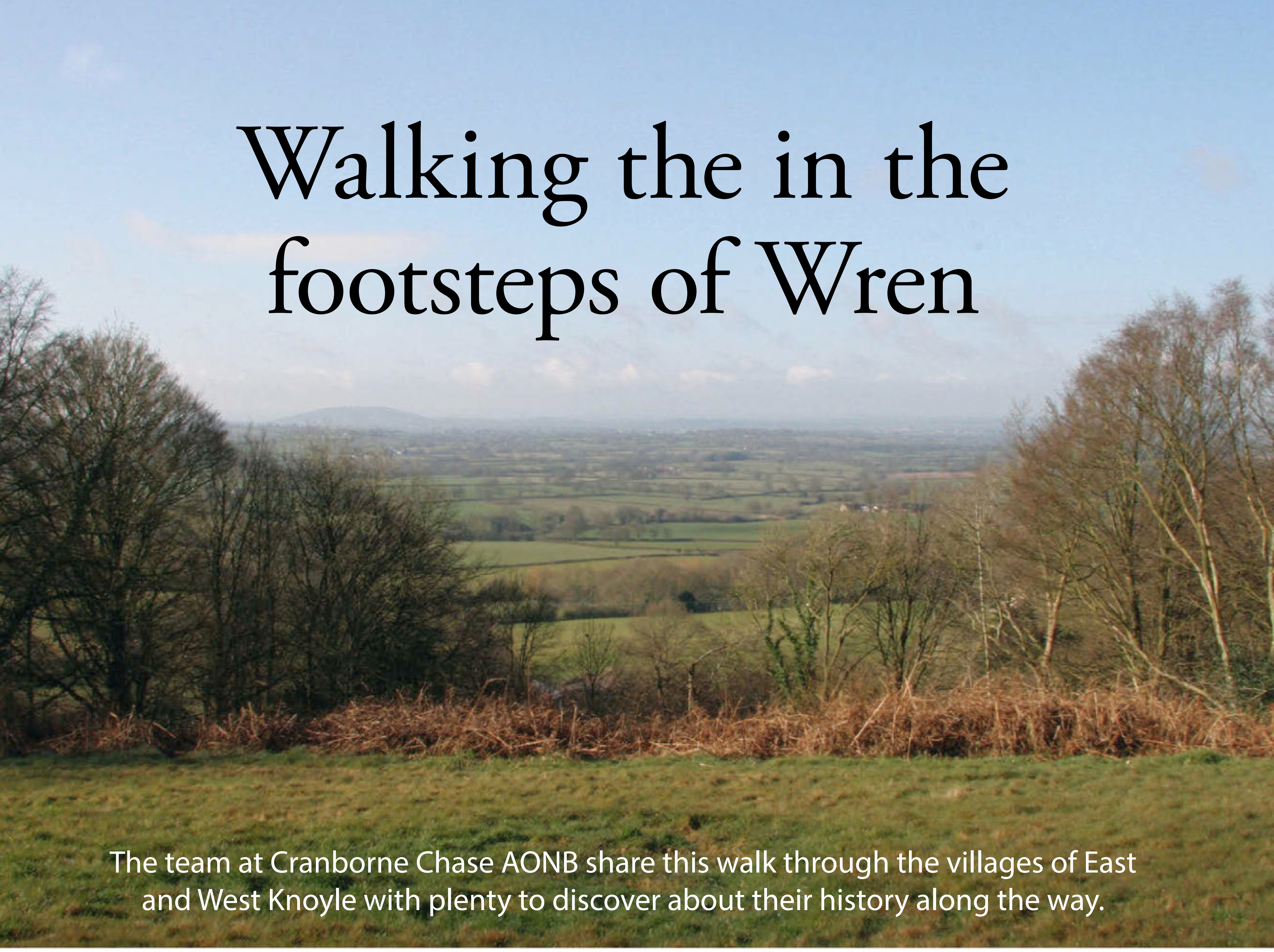
Walking the in the footsteps of Wren



The team at Cranborne Chase AONB share this walk through the villages of East and West Knoyle with plenty to discover about their history along the way.

Above: East Knoyle parish lands.

East Knoyle circular walk

Distance: 5.5 miles (8.8 km)
Time: Allow 3 hours
Terrain: Mostly country lanes with easy gradients, some field paths and tracks, muddy in places. 1 steep off road descent. No stiles
Start: East Knoyle Village Hall car park, Church Lane, East Knoyle SP3 6AE.

- *www.cranbornechase.org.uk*

DISCOVER PICTURESQUE East Knoyle, a village steeped in history. The birthplace of famous architect Sir Christopher Wren, born in 1632, and who continued living in the village until 1647 (see page 20).

The village was also visited by Henry VIII during his courtship with his third wife Jane Seymour. Explore the undulating narrow lanes of East and West Knoyle, Saxon churches, a former windmill and enjoy breath-taking views on this outstanding circular walk.

❶ Turn left out of East Knoyle village hall car-park onto Church Road heading towards the centre of the village passing the Saxon church of St Mary's on the right. Continue straight on past Wren's Community Shop on your right. Turn left up Wise Lane and follow the lane as it bears left. Just past the cottage numbered 116, take the first right along bridleway. Continue along the bridleway keeping between fields and carry straight on towards New Road. Go through a metal gate and bear right. Do not go left past the estate office buildings. Go straight ahead down towards the phone box.

❷ Turn left on New Road with Clouds House on the left. At the top of the hill, bear right along track to a beautifully preserved windmill without its sails called The Throdmill. Continue along the track in front of the windmill bearing right across the open-space along Wise Lane. Continue straight ahead following the lane past the 17th Century thatched Fox and Hounds pub on the right where you can stop for refreshments. Continue through the tiny hamlet of Upton and past the lane called Sutton Bottom on the right.

❸ Just past Chapel Farmhouse which dates back to the 1600s, turn left and take the track forking right along the Monarch's Way (this section is off-road and can be muddy). Bear left at the far edge of Cleeve Hill. Follow the edge of the field with The Warren to your right. This was an area once used by the Normans to farm rabbits. Go through the gate in the corner of the field and begin the steep descent to Manor Farm (take care as this can be slippery). Enjoy the attractive views of open countryside. Turn right through the gate through the farmyard.

❹ From Manor Farm, bear left into the street which you will follow through the village of West Knoyle. St Mary the Virgin church on the right is well worth a short detour. After visiting the church, continue straight ahead through West Knoyle village for half a mile passing the opening on the left to the Woodland Trust Nature Reserve Puckwell Coppice and Mackintosh Davidson Wood (a large area of ancient semi natural woodland).

Points of Interest

a The Saxon church of St Mary's

This has been the heart of the village for over 1,000 years and well worth a visit. The plasterwork in the chancel is unique and designed by Sir Christopher Wren's father who was appointed as rector in 1623.

b Haslam's Shop

Opposite the Community Shop in front of the children's play-area, you will find a plinth marking the spot where Sir Christopher Wren was born. The Wren family home was Knoyle Rectory (now Knoyle Place) along Church Road, but when a fire broke out, the rector and his wife moved to Haslam's Shop (formerly a draper's shop) on the corner of Wise Lane where their famous son was born. It was demolished in 1878 due to road widening.

c Clouds House

Home of the influential Wyndham family during the 19th and early 20th centuries. It was designed by Philip Webb for Percy Wyndham, a politician and one of the original members of 'The Souls' (an aristocratic social political debating group) and is one of Webb's grandest designs. Now the building is a famous drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre.

d The Throdmill

The name of the windmill which stands majestically on Windmill Hill. It dates back to the 1800s but its origins are much earlier. Two sail - yards (the arms of the windmill to which the sails were attached) were bought for its predecessor in 1377. It ceased being a working windmill in about 1930 and is now a private residence. Also, rest a while to admire the heart stopping views across the Blackmore Vale in Dorset or enjoy a picnic. It has always been a popular place for picnics; in the 1800s. evangelists would travel from miles to peach here at church picnics.

Above: The Throdmill.

e The Monarch's Way

A long-distance footpath along which King Charles II escaped following the English Civil War in the 17th century.

f St Mary the Virgin church

Late 12th century. Spot the rude gargoyle adorning the tower on the corner of the church directly opposite the main entrance!

g Puckwell Coppice and Mackintosh Davidson Wood

A nature reserve owned by the Woodland Trust. If you have time, it is worth exploring the network of permissive routes. Puckwell Coppice has a pagan well. 'Puca' is old English for hobgoblin, in folklore, a well dwelling mischievous creature and the saying goes that the well here remains a goblin's well as it was never blessed by the church. Farmers would leave bread and milk out for Puck in order to prevent bad luck falling on their family and farm.

h Park Pale

This marks the boundary of a Medieval deer park, an enclosed area for deer bounded by a ditch and bank with wooden fence of stakes on top to stop them escaping.

i Park Coppice Woods

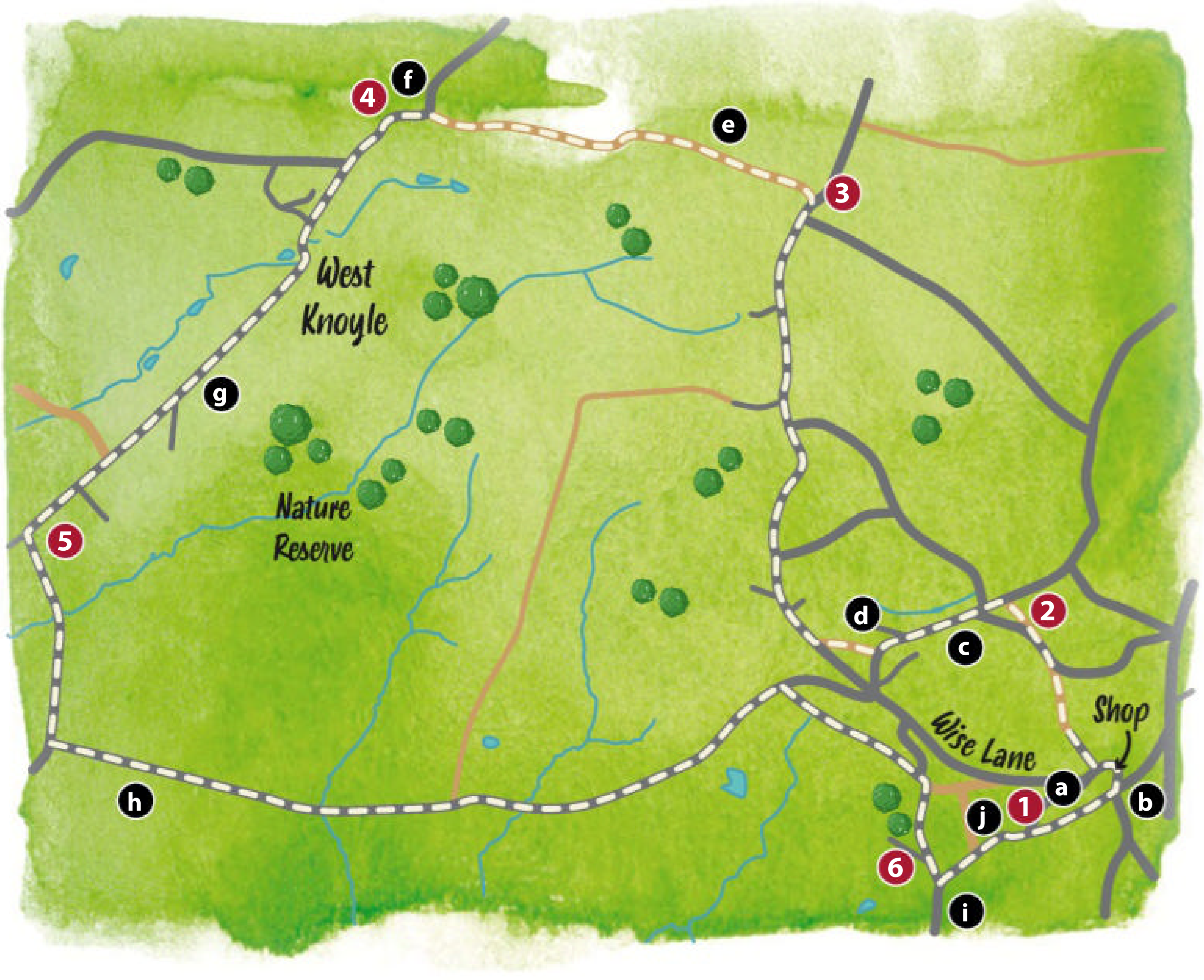
These woods hold a tragic secret. About one-third of the population of the village were lost to the Black Death in 1663 and many were buried in a plague pit in these woods.

j Knoyle Rectory

Now called Knoyle Place, the former home of the Wren family. The elegant Georgian portion was built in 1799.

5 Continue past Oxleaze Farm of the right and at the entrance to Bush Farm Bison Centre Visitor Attraction take a left turn skirting the boundary of Common Wood along the lane. At Park Corner Farm, take a left turn immediately after the farm passing Park Pale. Continue straight along past Lugmarsh Farm / Diary and Brickyard Farm on the right towards the hamlet of Underhill following the road. Ignore the first turning along the land on the left. After this turning, the road bear right, carry straight on to the end of the lane where it joins Holloway Lane.

6 Take a sharp turning left onto Holloway Lane and through the hamlet of Holloway past Park Coppice on the right heading back to the village of East Knoyle. Continue along Church Road past the impressive former home of the Wren family, Knoyle Rectory, now called Knoyle Place on your left. Further along on the left is the former village school, and opposite a 1300's thatched deer keeper's hut. Admire the beautiful oriental style windows of the former school reminiscent of houses in the middle East. Return to East Knoyle Village Hall and car-park next to the former school. WL



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Man’s best friend needs a helping paw

With around 12 million dogs in the UK, we are a nation of dog lovers, but with the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, many people have been forced to make the devastating decision that they can no longer take care of their four-legged friends and are turning to Dogs Trust for help. Zoe Blackman from the charity explains more about their work here in the county and how to support them.

IN DECEMBER 2022, The Dogs Trust recorded a milestone in its 131-year history, receiving its 50,000th enquiry from owners who reached a point of desperation and sadly needed to handover their pet to be rehomed.

The increasing cost of living isn't just affecting being able to buy essentials such as dog food as the charity has shared that dog owners are also concerned about the rise in vet bills, routine treatments, and insurance, all of which are adding to the financial strain.

As well as money worries, some people contacting the charity to give up their dog are saying that they physically can't be there for them anymore, as they are having to work longer hours or take on a second job to make ends meet. Others are having to move to reduce their rent and cannot find dog-friendly accommodation and are therefore forced to give up their dog.

> 'We are always looking for more people to foster dogs'

A recent Dogs Trust survey revealed that a quarter of dog owners in the South-West are worried that as costs continue to rise in 2023, the crisis will impact on how well they'll able to continue to care for their dog. The survey also showed that 61per cent of people who don't currently own a dog think that the rising cost of living would prevent them from getting a dog in the next year.

The demand for help is being felt across the charity's 21 rehoming centres in the UK, including Dogs Trust Salisbury. Caring for up to 80 dogs in their kennels, the dedicated team work hard to give the dogs the care and attention they need as well as finding them their forever homes – however in the current climate, they know that as soon as one dog is rehomed, there'll be another to take in.

Neil Barker, assistant manager at Dogs Trust Salisbury says: "There's no downtime at the moment, we are continuously taking in dogs, rehoming them and then taking in another dog. We are experiencing an unprecedented demand to take in dogs – a pressure being felt throughout the sector.

"We have set up a temporary food bank at the centre for anyone struggling to feed their dog during these difficult times, and we are grateful for donations of unopened and in date dog food and treats.

"In response to this influx of demand and to be able to help as many people and dogs as possible we have expanded our Home from Home fostering scheme. We have a wonderful network of volunteers who take in a dog in need to their home and take care of them for the short-term until we have found them their forever home. Without fosterers our waiting lists would be even longer and we're so grateful to our carers and everything they do.

"We are always looking for more people to foster dogs – it's a great way to temporarily have a dog, without the financial commitment as we cover all the costs. There are endless rewards for fostering, you get to experience all the joy of having a dog in your life, as well as being part of that dog's journey and seeing them go to their forever home."

If you're a Salisbury dog-lover and would like to have a four-legged friend in your life but are not able to have one of your own full-time, you may want to consider becoming a foster carer. Not only is it a fun and fulfilling experience, while helping dogs in need, you can have a housemate hound without putting pressure on the purse strings. Dogs Trust cover the costs for food, bedding, toys and any necessary vet bills. As a foster carer, you'll need to be 18 years or older, able to bring the dog back to the centre to meet potential adopters, and able to continue with any ongoing training (supported by the expert behaviour and training team). Dogs Trust Salisbury is urgently seeking more people who are willing to take in big dogs, those with little to no housetraining or a dog with specific behaviour training requirements.

The demand for help is being felt across the charity's 21 rehoming centres in the UK, including Dogs Trust Salisbury. They are urgently seeking more people who are willing to take in big dogs, those with little to no housetraining or a dog with specific behaviour training requirements.

The dedicated Dogs Trust team work hard to give all the dogs the care and attention they need as well as finding them their forever homes.

Welcoming a dog into your life, either on a short or long-term basis is an incredibly exciting time, but if you're looking to add a canine companion into your family permanently, there are some things you should think about before bringing them home. Carefully consider if you're dog-ready, and how they would fit into your life – they're a big responsibility and you must be able to commit time, energy, and money to give them the life they deserve.

If you have thought carefully about getting a dog and have decided it's the right decision, why not give a loving home to one of the many dogs available for adoption from Dogs Trust Salisbury. You'll not only be enriching your life but also the life of a dog in need of a home to call their own, as well as helping the charity care for the next dog looking for their new family.

It's important, however, when choosing a dog to find out as much information about them as possible to make sure that they are the 'paw-fect' pooch for you.

If a particular dog has caught your eye, you can make sure they would be your ideal canine companion by asking about their history (how long have they been at the rehoming centre, have they been rehomed before), their health (any medication, previous surgeries) and their behaviour (energy levels, are they housetrained, what they're like around other dogs).

At Dogs Trust, the team are there every step of the way. They will help find the right dog for you (and the perfect family for them) and they will be able to tell you everything they've observed about the dog while they've been at the centre. The support doesn't stop once you've found your new companion and have taken them home – they also give ongoing post-adoption help from canine experts however long ago you adopted from the charity.

As the charity continues to find dogs loving homes they deserve, it also strives to keep as many dogs with their families as they can and is urging anyone who is struggling to look after their dog to contact Dogs Trust as soon as possible, before it gets to the point when the heart-breaking decision to give up their dog must be made. WL

- *For more information about dog ownership, adopting a dog or to contact Dogs Trust visit www.dogstrust.org.uk*

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Fieldwork was undertaken between 12-13 December 2022. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

**3 per cent of dog owners surveyed by Dogs Trust said they would have to consider rehoming their dog if the cost of living continues to rise. There are an estimated 12 million dogs in the UK, according to the Pet Food Manufacturers Association; 3 per cent of this is 360,000.*

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Girls' game is ready to kick on

The success of England's women at last year's European Championships and their prospects at the World Cup in July has sparked an explosion of interest in the female game. Gary Lawrence looks at its rapid growth in Wiltshire – and the challenges it faces.

IN NOVEMBER 2000 the *Gazette & Herald* published a story about how 10-year-old Emily King of Christian Malford had fallen foul of the Football Association's (FA) rules and been banned from playing for the village's Under 11 team. Why? Because she was a girl and this was a boys' team.

It seems incredible now that little more than 22 years ago the FA actively prevented girls from progressing in football in the knowledge that there were virtually no other places for them to play.

Fast forward to 2023 and the landscape is very different – and changing all the time. Just six months after England Women beat their German counterparts in the final of the European Championships at Wembley there are 2,175 FA-affiliated players of all ages in Wiltshire, with 352 of them playing in mixed junior boys' and girls' teams – just like Emily wanted to.

Swindon Town Women on the ball.

Above: Swindon Town Women at a fixture at Swindon Town FC's County Ground.

Left: Becky Knox coaches one of the Marlborough Angels' eight girls' teams.

This popularity hasn't just been inspired by the England ladies' triumph, it is the result of a steady growth fuelled by a growing acceptance of girls' and women's right to be on a football pitch and an appetite from the players to not just play but compete.

"In 2018 there were just 1,291 players and 56 girls' and women's teams and our strategy was to double both by 2024," says Ashley Cornick, Wiltshire FA's football development officer for women and girls. "We have the 2,175 affiliated and they are playing in 135 teams, so we are ahead of our target already.

"With winning the Euros and the Women's World Cup next year in the mix, you'd be looking to double that figure again in five years and I think that's achievable."

Little girls now have their own footballing heroes in the likes of Jill Scott, Chloe Kelly and Lucy Bronze and the opportunity to emulate them but the game at all levels, in Wiltshire as everywhere, faces huge challenges to keep pace with demand. It needs coaches, pitches, structure, and finance.

Becky Knox has been a coach with Marlborough Angels, part of Marlborough Youth FC, since 2014 and was instrumental, alongside club secretary John Whitehead, in offering girls in the area the chance to play. The 30-year-old played herself until "two children and three knee operations" put paid to her playing career with Marlborough Ladies, but she had earned her first coaching badge at 16.

"When we first started doing taster sessions we were introducing the idea to the girls that they could play football – whereas now they already know they want to play football, they are playing it in the playgrounds so we are just introducing the club to them.

"When we first began we had 25 girls but now we have eight age groups, some of which have 25 girls with a waiting list."

Players are first attracted through the FA-funded Wildcats taster sessions, a fun-based introduction to the game, through schools at Easter of Year 2 and then at summer soccer schools.

"We kind of hook them so they come back in September and then they get introduced to club football," says Becky. "We made the decision very early on to split the small amount of girls we had into age groups and put a team into the league and that snowballed everything else that we've done since. Girls saw their friends playing every week and thought 'I can do what my big brother does' and wanted to be involved."

Parents are encouraged to take on the running of the teams formed from each new crop of players and are supported by the club through mentoring and the funding for them to take their coaching badges. Says Becky: "Then the next Easter we are ready to start again, families know it's coming, we have names on the list for this year already."

She is one of few female coaches to be seen on the county's touchlines and believes

Young female players are discovering more training opportunities across the county.

confidence is holding back more from joining her. "It doesn't bother me that I'm a female coach in a male-dominated world," she says.

"There's a group of mums who are interested in getting into coaching but they never played football when they were younger, so they feel they haven't got the right or the knowledge. You find the dads are the ones coaching and the mum does the admin because there's that myth that dads have played so they should be the ones who coach."

She admits to a certain satisfaction when one of her sides beats a male-coached opponent. "It's a good feeling," she smiles.

One of Ashley's goals is to attract more women into coaching, refereeing and administration as well as playing. "There are mums out there watching their sons or daughters play football," he says. "Maybe they don't have knowledge or interest in football as such but they do possess skills through parenting and they are transferable to the game."

Becky believes the absence of female coaches may only be solved once the current generation of players hang up their boots. She says: "In five to 10 years' time you are going to see the female game absolutely snowball and you are going to see the coaches coming through and all these girls wanting to do it but we have to make sure everything is in place and ready for them."

There are still 60 per cent of clubs in the county with no involvement in female football. "One of the pushbacks we get from clubs is the facilities," says Ashley, "they might have access to an all-weather pitch for training, but they may have 20 boys teams to cater for so finding extra space for a girls team is one of the biggest challenges."

He and the FA are working with clubs to help build partnerships with schools and other organisations with pitches that lie dormant at weekends. The FA can also help clubs access Football Foundation funding for pitch improvement – but any bids now must come with a guarantee that the pitches will be made accessible to all.

> ‘Even some of the boys are pretending to be female players’

The other big challenge is the structure of the local game. The number of places to kick a ball from six and upwards grows every week but there are considerably fewer teams for girls of 17 and over and a number of them drop out of the game around the age of 15.

The FA has launched a programme, Squad Girls, to keep them involved with less competitive activities – but it isn't always the answer.

"There isn't the breadth of opportunity for girls yet – but it is coming," says Becky. "There are more girls playing now and as they get older there will be more opportunities. Obviously, there are more Women's Super League teams around so there is that vision they can progress.

"Before, it was kind of 'what's the point there's nowhere to go with it' but now there is and I think it is becoming a bit more prevalent. I think that drop-off is going to fade away in the next five to 10 years."

Tom Hartley, Swindon Town Women's director of football is hoping his side will help provide a pathway for the county's players. On the back of the Euros triumph the club is being incorporated into the operation Swindon Town FC, at the instigation of owner Clem Morfuni.

"I think it would have happened anyway and Clem has a passion for women and girls' football and he sees on many levels on why it is the right thing to do as a club, but the Euros has helped the transition," he says.

His team has gone from playing in front of 50 people at Fareham Town's ground to 200 at the club's Foundation Park and attracted a record 720 when they played a Women's FA Cup game at the County Ground.

Becoming a part of the men's club could bring financial benefits in the form of better sponsorship opportunities – which could mean payment of least expenses for the women's team's entirely voluntary set-up.

He says: "I guess we are in a position now where we are trying to create a set-up that would be attractive to players. We want to create the best possible environment for them to come into so they feel like they could get better as a player.

"A feature of the fact that the game is still at an embryonic phase is that it is growing at an exponential rate – but not everything is growing at the same speed. The interest in the game, the pathways and the opportunity for players and the aspiration to play at a higher level is moving quickly, but some of the other stuff around it in terms of the human resource and the funding needed is coming, but it takes time."

Tom has been in and around the game for more than 20 years and says the attitude to it has almost completely changed – almost. "The right to play has changed, the social consensus that football is for boys and other sports are for girls, is going," he says. "There's still a prejudice in places and I guess when there's something new coming there will also be some lashings of some dinosaur tales perhaps in terms of people's perceptions of who should be doing what."

For Becky, who spends a lot of time in schools coaching, the evidence that the change in mindset is permanent can be seen in the playgrounds. "You hear the boys pretending to be Messi and the girls pretending to be Jill Scott," she says. "Even some of the boys are pretending to be female players.

"I think the Euros has had an effect on the attitude of the boys and girls, they see them as equals and they are now playing together in some of the schools we go into. Before, the girls wouldn't join in but now they are and they don't even care they are playing with the boys, it's just natural now." WL

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Amelia Gammon
founder of bide

Taking on global challenges

Amelia Gammon is the founder of eco-cleaning social enterprise company – bide. She explains to Mary-Vere Parr how turning homes into factories can change lives and the environment.

“COCONUT, OAT or cow’s milk in your coffee?” Asks Amelia Gammon, founder and CEO of eco cleaning product company bide, as she opens the door of her house near Pewsey.

The welcome is typical of the considered lifestyle Amelia, her wife Rachel and their four children aged three to nine have developed since moving to Wiltshire from Wimbledon four years ago. On this freezing winter morning, their home, a converted chapel, is warm, the coffee is great and Rachel has made fruit bread.

I am not the first visitor to be made welcome. “The first year after we moved, I think we only had two weekends without friends staying,” Amelia laughs. “They all left saying they felt rested and taken care of.”

When it came to setting up her own company, Amelia wanted to give her customers the same sense of being looked after. “I wanted them to feel that we’ve taken care of all the research about how environmentally sound our products are and that they don’t need to worry about anything,” she says. “Climate anxiety is a real problem because it leads to inertia. People panic and don’t know how to start living sustainably so they end up not doing anything at all. But we’re saying, bide your time, this is a stepping stone towards the next part of that journey.”

Amelia’s own journey began aged 17 when she became a vegetarian. And while her career in media and TV distribution saw her “flying all over the world, burning up carbon”, her weekends were spent “walking around bare foot, trying to live sustainably”. As her worry about the planet grew, she turned vegan, looked for ways to reduce waste and started to dream about a “very small, rainbow-coloured business”. Then, when she lost her job in the Covid pandemic, she decided to launch bide. “It sounds cowardly, but I thought, with the world on pause, if I fail, no one will see.”

Far from failing, bide has gone from strength to strength, picking up several awards along the way. But she is proudest of its B Corporation certification, awarded to companies that have met the highest standards of social and environmental performance, as well as being leaders in the movement for an inclusive, fair and regenerative economy. Scoring 98.7% seems to suggest there is little to improve on the model for an environmental and ethical business that is not just “kind to our beautiful earth” but also “helps provide a solution for both the climate and the social crises”.

The idea is simple: a range of chemically free, vegan, non-toxic cleaning products from toilet bombs to laundry powder and washing up liquid. All ingredients are sourced in the UK, bar the essential oils which currently are imported. “It’s basically the ingredients of your baking cupboard,” Amelia says. For the curious, ingredients are listed on the back of the packaging which is also recyclable and biodegradable.

Of course, other eco cleaning products are available although she believes they are not as environmentally friendly as they should be. But what really distinguishes bide from its competitors is how its products are manufactured.

“When I was at school, I remember learning about the spinning jenny and the incredible innovation in weaving that was built upon a cottage industry,” Amelia says. “Effectively we are just recreating that system.”

BiDE
Home Cleaning
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Zesty Lemon
Washing-up Liquid
Fragrant Peppermint
Dishwasher Powder
Orange & Bergamot
Laundry Powder
Plastic Free | Vegan | Recyclable | Compostable
Harriet

Right: The products are all made within people’s homes, creating a 21st century cottage industry.

She explains how bide recruits its network of home workers. “We have a no questions asked policy,” she says. “We don’t require a CV, any prior experience or an interview because we specifically want to attract people who have not been able to get work previously.” Working with prison, refugee and drug project charities, Gammon targets a marginalised, predominantly female workforce. The result, she says, is that “from day one, you have this incredible loyal, impassioned group who just want to help the business”.

Amelia says she feels a huge responsibility and duty of care towards these home workers, many on universal credit, who average 15-20 hours a week and £15 an hour. But the model fulfils her desire to empower women and the network is ever growing. Currently, there are some 400 bide home workers, with a 90-strong wait list.

Even as a successful, professional woman, she clearly identifies with the discrimination and prejudice many of these women experience. “One of the biggest surprises I find as an entrepreneur is that it’s still an obstacle to be a woman,” she says. “From personal branding workshops to investor pitching, it’s still a male dominated area. For example, we still even use female founders as a proxy, and founders as a proxy for men. We have an awful habit of adding ‘female’ as a prefix to any position of influence.”

> ‘She aims to bring production within 30 miles of consumption’

Applicants are sent small versions of bide’s product range to make at home. If their samples pass the quality control test, workers get sent batches of ingredients on a Monday, with finished goods collected the following Friday.

“The most vital part of the model is investing in hyper-local economies,” she says. She aims to bring production within 30 miles of consumption. In the pipeline is the launch of prison workshops which will allow bide to supply larger retailers. But for now, the main distribution centre remains in Pewsey, which ships out up to 900 orders a month across the UK. Some 450 customers have monthly delivery boxes “curated from real life experience”. For each delivery by Royal Mail, bide plants a tree to offset carbon emissions, until such time as it can move to a 100% electric fleet.

Covid saw online sales boom for bide and the trend continues. But in Wiltshire, bide stockists include the Lawn Farm Shop near Pewsey and you can also have laundry powder delivered with your pint on some local milk rounds.

Price points remain an issue. The air source heat, solar panels and energy storing batteries in Amelia’s “off-grid” home do not come cheap and neither do the raw ingredients of a truly environmentally sound product. But she insists that she tries to keep margins at a low threshold so bide prices are comparable to other eco products in a supermarket. “That means we are not taking the same kind of margin as bigger brands,” she says. “It’s a strategic decision we’ve made because it our mission to make sustainability more than a middle-class privilege.”

A small start-up, Amelia says, allows her to have a dialogue with customers and respond quickly. For instance, within a month she was able to change from a dishwashing soap to a more user-friendly liquid concentrate. Now she is adding hand and body washes to the range to meet “bide tribe” demand.

Amelia Gammon is driven by her belief that “we need to take full responsibility and accountability for the impact we have on people and the planet, injecting purpose into everything we do”.

Her purpose is to find ways to make it simple for people to make more sustainable choices. “I know I can’t change the climate single handedly,” she adds, “But I believe in the ripple effect.” WL

- *www.bideplanet.com*

Amelia and her family moved to Pewsey four years ago.

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in the snow

A new world of learning awaits

For those approaching later life u3a offers a different perspective through learning, enjoyment and friendship. Elise Sargent looks at the organisation's impact.

FOR MORE than four decades, u3a has been providing learning opportunities, fun and friendship to thousands of people across the UK who want to live life to the full.

From geology to genealogy, yoga to singing, there's something for everyone at u3a, and its 400,000 members are always up for a challenge.

The only criterion for joining is that you are no longer in full-time work. That means most members are older adults who have already had long, fulfilling careers and can bring forth a wealth of experience.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that loneliness has reached epidemic proportions. When the pandemic hit in March 2020, u3a members had to find a way of staying in touch and keeping that vital human connection, even if we couldn't meet in person. The use of technology by u3a was vital in ensuring that members were not left isolated.

Despite a large number of u3a members – and the wider public – never having used video calling technology such as Teams and Zoom before lockdown 2020, within the movement there was a huge call to arms to get everyone online.

The u3a is built on a foundation of skill sharing – and that is exactly what happened during the pandemic. Those who already had the skills needed to embrace digital technology, helped their peers. Computer-savvy members rallied round to get people online. Emails were sent, workshops were hastily arranged and detailed demonstrations were given.

Andrew Smith, membership secretary of Sarum u3a, part of Salisbury District u3as, said learning how to embrace technology made even the most unexpected subjects accessible. He is a member of both the Painting for Pleasure Group and the Wine Appreciation Group.

"Using Zoom and WhatsApp allowed us to carry on right the way through lockdown," he says. "For Painting for Pleasure, each

Below: Painting for Pleasure sessions take place across the county.

Travelling around the world – from the comfort of your own home

When lockdown hit, u3a members sprang into action. A core of eight volunteers undertook training in video conferencing and rolled out Zoom tutorials across the u3a networks.

From that original group, training sessions were eventually given to 4,000 members, enabling them to go online at the height of the pandemic when there was no possibility of meeting up.

The tutorials were clear and accessible and started with the very basics in groups no bigger than 12. It was based on theory, showing, then questions. Following that, u3a teamed up with Barclays as part of the bank's Digital Wings programme of workshops.

Members were shown Internet Basics, Digital Safety and how to use the internet for entertainment. Despite not being able to leave their homes, they could still visit museums in New York to remotely view exciting exhibitions. It was about making the most of what they could do.

Once restrictions were lifted, there were positives that the charity still uses today.

The Let's Talk Tech group was set up by the movement's chair, Liz Thackray to harness the power of hybrid meetings. Some people are still not comfortable about meeting in person, but by using the hybrid meeting technology, they can still participate in their favourite groups.

week we are given a subject. We paint our interpretation of that, display them, and critique them at the end of the session.

"During lockdown we painted at home and sent pictures of our work through WhatsApp and responded with our comments."

The group had 12 regular contributors each week with the subject leader explaining and encouraging members to use WhatsApp.

"I'm so glad we did, otherwise, we would have really missed the social aspect of getting together as a group," says Andrew. "The continued routine of that weekly connection was a lifeline. It provided an element of normalcy which we did not have at the beginning of lockdown."

The Sarum Wine Appreciation Group meets once a month in each other's homes where around half a dozen bottles of wine are distributed by the host for tasting. There is a different theme for each meeting and members were determined to carry on even when socialising was banned during the pandemic.

Andrew said that before lockdowns, the only time any of the wine aficionados had used video calls was the experience of shaky Skype calls to relatives around the world.

He added: "After some teething problems, with questions such as, 'how do I get all the people to appear in the little boxes on the screen at the same time?' it was a success."

It even allowed members who had moved away from Sarum to join in and stay connected.

"I'd say between 75 and 80 per cent of the group's members stayed with us throughout lockdown," said Andrew. "Instead of talking about a specific subject, we discussed the wines we had been drinking in our own homes, we learned to adapt."

Both groups continued until it was safe to meet up again.

The organisation accessed funding to buy new equipment such as laptops and cameras to improve the online offering from their own homes. Members used it to trace ancestors in family history groups and get to grips with complex digital photograph software to edit and enhance photos in the photography groups. Archaeological interest groups even got to grips with Google Maps to trace outlines for potential dig sites.

The legacy of the great strides made during lockdown is the continued use of technology by groups. Wiltshire u3as now have a digitally savvy membership that is always ready for a challenge.

There are u3as across Wiltshire, including in, Trowbridge, Melksham, Sarum, Salisbury and Devizes.

- *To find out more about u3a, visit u3a.org.uk*

60% of over 55s frustrated by packaging design

The u3a has collaborated with Design Age Institute in launching a petition to trigger a debate in parliament on the issue of poorly designed packaging, and propose the creation and enforcement of a minimum inclusive design standard for packaging.

It follows a report by the two organisations that revealed the most frustrating everyday household objects as we age.

Working in collaboration with u3a members, Design Age Institute surveyed over 2,000 people aged between 55 and 104, and brought together the findings to create its report Designing the everyday for a less frustrating later life.

The biggest stress factors identified in homes were packaging-related, with over 60 per cent of all respondents choosing packaging as their main frustration. Almost 50 per cent identified food packaging as a real frustration, while medical packaging was found to cause irritation and stress by 12.5 per cent of those surveyed.

In terms of packaging, all types of food packaging came in for criticism — ring pulls, glass jars, clingfilm, peel-back labels, and resealable packaging.

To coincide with the report's release, an online petition was launched proposing an inclusive design standard for packaging, with the aim of gathering 100,000 signatures and triggering a debate in parliament on the issue of poorly designed packaging.

Other everyday household items which were identified as causing significant frustration and annoyance include duvet covers, TV remotes, high cupboards and keys and locks.

Electric plugs are often too low down and difficult to remove, while vacuum cleaners are too heavy. Small keys on computers and mobile phones are also a problem, with respondents finding it difficult to type without making typing errors.

- Sign the petition at https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/625867.

Invigorate the mind and body

There's never a bad time to get active, writes Alex Muse. He says Wiltshire offers a huge range of indoor and outdoor sport and leisure whatever your ability or fitness.

Group activities such as AquaFit are popular.

WHATEVER YOUR health, age or level of fitness it's never too late to start a more active lifestyle and the benefits can still have a life changing effect – even in your later years.

Regular exercise helps your brain, heart, lungs, muscles, and bones stay healthy, and keeps your body strong and supple. It can make a big difference to your quality of life by improving your mood, boosting your confidence and self-esteem, giving you a sense of achievement, helping you relax and relieve stress, reducing your risk of falls, making everyday tasks easier, reducing aches and pains and boosting your energy.

There are still a huge number of activities and ways to increase your physical activity levels as you get older, with the government's guidelines for older people suggesting a minimum of 150 minutes per week moderate intensity exercise, or 75 minutes vigorous intensity exercise per week, or a combination of both.

For many, joining a gym or leisure centre can be quite an intimidating experience, but the benefits can far outweigh that initial anxiety. Leisure centres are a great place for people of all fitness abilities to visit, and with fitness professionals on hand to help and support.

Gym inductions can help introduce fitness equipment to first time users and ensure that the correct technique is adopted, while gym programme sessions ensure that personal aims and goals are taken into consideration when preparing a workout programme. Including cardiovascular activity (things like walking, rowing, cycling, running) help to improve the efficiency of your heart and lungs, while strength exercises improve your muscular strength and bone density.

Swimming may be a more preferable option, as the water provides a supportive and cushioning effect around the body and enables a total body workout. It's a gentler way to exercise and may help if you suffer from uncomfortable joint pain or mobility issues. Swimming pools often provide lane swimming, allowing different swimmers to swim at different speeds according to their ability, or sessions catering specifically for older people.

Bob, 78, of Pewsey is a regular swimmer. "Swimming keeps me fit and healthy and it is always great to meet my 'swim buddies' every week," he says. "I swim between 50 and 80 lengths per session depending on how I feel on the day. I swim with a purpose and use these swims to raise money for charity."

Particular swim session times often attract like-minded people each week, giving you the opportunity to meet others and make friends. Group exercise classes like AquaFit are popular; with the water used as resistance in a variety of movements aiming to increase heart rate and improve body conditioning.

If you're looking to get out and about, walking is an accessible and practical way of getting out into the great outdoors, an invigorating blast of fresh air and a boost to your mood. There are many miles of paths and trails in the county and plenty of places to find routes and ideas including the Visit Wiltshire and Wiltshire Council's websites.

If the thought of walking on your own is not appealing, Get Wiltshire Walking is a volunteer run network of walking groups across the county with regular weekly walks. This project aims to engage local people in regular activity, providing different walks and enabling people to meet others, make friends and grow their social circle through walking.

The programme has generated tremendous community spirit within local groups and has been a lifeline for people new to the area, struggling with injury or mobility issues or just a lack of confidence.

Cycling has seen an explosion of interest in the last decade, and has become a sport that participants can maintain involvement in well into their 60's and 70's. Benefits include strengthening of muscles, particularly those used for balance, coordination and strength activities, increased independence, friendship, enjoyment and improved cardiovascular function.

With very little impact on bones and joints, cycling can help keep your immune system strong and ward off the other effects of aging. Connecting Wiltshire has a wide array of information on bike routes, clubs and groups on their website and is a good first step if you're looking to start, or visit your local bike shop as they can provide information on the right type of bike for you and clubs or groups in your area.

Walking sports are a great way of maintaining contact with your sport without the intensity, impact or speed of the traditional game. There are well established walking football and walking netball groups in Wiltshire, which are great for maintaining friendships, staying involved in the sport and keeping active. WL

- *For more information wiltshire.gov.uk/leisure and for details on walking sports contact sportsdevelopment@wiltshire.gov.uk.*

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Silver Swans given poise, pleasure and pride

Renowned ballerina Jacquie Anderson has danced all over the world but now she is using her skills to inspire the less accomplished. She told Mary-Vere Parr about how her adult classes transform lives.

"FACE THE mirror, hands on hips, right foot sl-i-i-de, left foot behind. Now the other way, left foot sl-i-i-ide, right foot in front…"

Ballerina Jacquie Anderson is demonstrating to a Wednesday afternoon Silver Swans class in the studio of Devizes Leisure Centre. Four ladies and one brave man, newly joining the class today, follow suit.

There is the gentle swish of five pairs of ballet shoes (and one pair of socks) across the wooden floor as the class follows Jacquie. After a couple of practices, she introduces pre-recorded music. Instantly, as the notes wash over us, this simple movement is transformed into something expressive and purposeful. Even something beautiful for those who can also manage the arm movements to accompany the dance steps.

"I love dancing and cannot imagine it not being part of my life," says Jacquie. "It is such a joy to see others getting pleasure from moving too. People just love dancing to music.

"I am particularly pleased for my Silver Swans ballet students who are all over 55, some of them in their 80s, as they have improved their posture, balance and ability to pick up steps."

Some Silver Swans have danced before, but often not for a very long time. Others are completely new to ballet. "There's been a resurgence in older people wanting to keep fit," Jacquie says. "And they're looking for new and different ways to exercise. We have all got to look after ourselves as we get older and, personally, I can't stand the gym, though lots of people get a lot out of it."

Apart from the physical benefits, the improvements to balance, flexibility and core strength, ballet is particularly good for maintaining bone strength and mental agility. "It's much harder than it looks," says one Silver Swan with feeling. Even from where I am sitting watching, I can see the concentration required.

"Ballet is a workout for the brain as well as the body," Jacquie says. "You really can't think of anything else, which is actually the point, isn't it? I've had some lovely feedback, especially from people who are having a difficult time. They value the release the classes give them."

Above: A Silver Swans class in the studio at Devizes Leisure Centre.

The social benefit of ballet has been underscored by Covid. During the pandemic, Jacquie switched from in-person classes, to Zoom from her kitchen. "It worked really well," she admits, "People really needed that sense of community and we got to share each other's experience."

She still teaches a few classes online but encourages students to come to the studio when they can because of the social benefits. "It's a great place to meet like-minded people and make friends," she says. Classes in Chippenham, Corsham and Devizes usually number between eight and 14 people and range from adult ballet, through contemporary dance to Silver Swans.

Barre Revive, a new, floor-based exercise programme using some ballet moves, focuses on the core, includes stretches and finishes with a relaxation session to calm mind and body. "I have noticed a great difference in my core strength and have also managed to maintain my strength and flexibility whilst unable to do the ballet class," says one student, a retired physiotherapist. "I feel the class is a great option when injured or unable to do high impact classes. I have enjoyed it so much I plan to continue with it after returning to ballet."

> 'Like them, I hope that I will still be swanning around in my 80s'

Socialising is not just limited to the studio and Jacquie is taking her students on a "school trip" to see Matthew Bourne's *Sleeping Beauty* when it tours to Bristol at the end of February. "It's nice to do that together," she says. "The first time we went, one of the ladies said she had never seen live dance before. It was fantastic to introduce someone to that."

She has a very particular connection to Matthew Bourne's New Adventures company. She was in the original cast of *Swan Lake,* Bourne's transformative male swan version that premiered at Sadlers Wells in 1995, transferred to The Piccadilly Theatre and then went on tour to Broadway and Los Angeles in the US as well as across the UK.

"It started off as a contemporary adaptation (of a classic) and then it kind of turned into something else," she recalls. "I didn't really appreciate it at the time but it was phenomenal."

Jacquie also performed in Bourne's *Nutcracker!, Highland Fling* and *Cinderella*. Her highlight roles include the Spanish Princess and the Moth Maiden in *Swan Lake* and the Sylph in *Highland Fling*. "Les Brotherston's stunning designs were the cherry on the top," she says.

Her career has been long and varied, encompassing acting and singing with TAG theatre company in Edinburgh, and dancing with the Vienna Festival Ballet, Scottish Dance Theatre and Scottish Ballet Steps. Venues have ranged from rarefied dance studios to pop up Flash Dance events in the open air.

Teaching has taken Jacquie all over the county from the London Contemporary Dance School to Gorseinon College, Wales and most recently to Bath Spa University. She continues to teach both ballet and contemporary techniques across seven classes in Chippenham, Corsham and Devizes to students aged 18 to 82.

She sees her body as "the primary locus for my experience of being human and of learning". She is learning the Argentine tango herself because "it's useful as a teacher to be in the position of learning". Her own classes are appropriately paced, patient and non-pressurising. There is no end-of-term show and her students say they are made to feel like "superstars". "It's the highlight of my week," says one Silver Swan. "I walk out a couple of inches taller."

Jacquie says she particularly enjoys teaching older people. She got her Silver Swans licence from the Royal Academy of Dance in 2018. Now, with a former New Adventures colleague, she is developing dance classes to take into care homes.

"I have to say, Silver Swans is one of my favourite groups, we work hard but we have a lot of fun," she says. "These students really are an inspiration and show you are never too old to dance. Like them, I hope that I will still be swanning around in my 80s."

Even while she says she is lucky enough to be still working in dance she has developed a second career in art. She completed an MA in Fine Art at Bath Spa School of Art and Design and uses video, mixed media, installation and painting to explore and document the body in space.

"I am investigating making and viewing art that leads us to experience art in a more physical way," she says. More recently, she has focused on landscape painting inspired by her Scottish roots and her father who was also a painter. An exhibition of her work at the Pound Arts Centre, Corsham is scheduled for September 2023.

This afternoon's class ends and the Silver Swans swap leg warmers and ballet shoes for jeans and heavy boots, wrapping up in heavy winter coats. "All the ladies are looking forward to reading this," Jacquie laughs as we say goodbye. Do I imagine it, or do they glide rather than trudge out into the cold afternoon? WL

- *More information on classes at jadancestudio.com, by searching for Jacquie's adult ballet on Facebook, calling 07813 182248 or emailing andersonjacquie13@gmail.com.*

Above: Jacquie Anderson teaching one of her regular Silver Swan classses.

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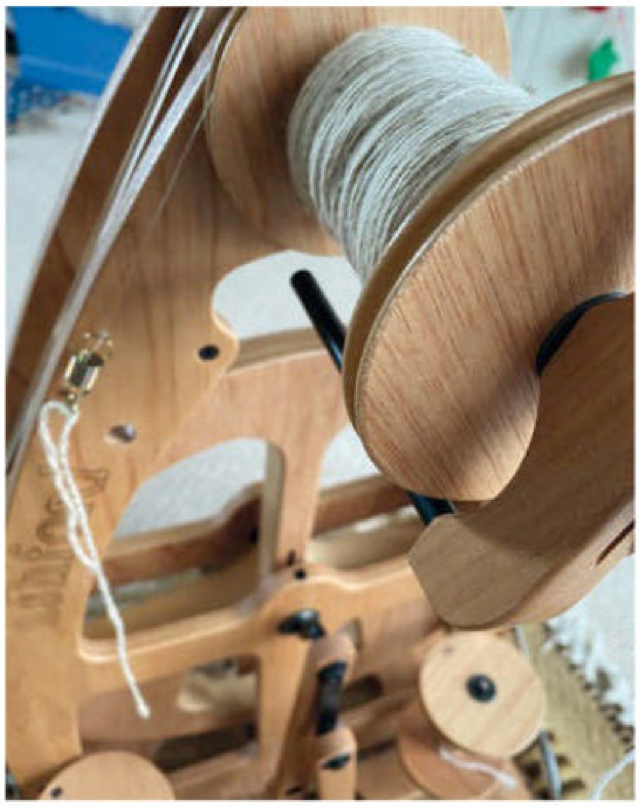
Crafty way to learn skills and make friends

After retiring from teaching Susie Richardson understood the importance of having something interesting to do as well as learning at the same time, so she decided to join The Wiltshire Guild of Spinners, Weavers and Dyers. She talks about the broad range of activities and skills on offer here in the county.



THE WILTSHIRE Guild of Spinners, Weavers and Dyers is part of the UK wide Association of Guilds of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers charity. Located in Steeple Ashton, our four workshops – two of which are dedicated to weaving – are just behind the village shop set amid a dyers garden. We are one of the few members guilds to have our own premises and dye garden, which is something we are very proud of.

The mission of the guild is to preserve and promote skills associated with our local heritage. We do this by sharing our combined knowledge and skills and by learning new things. Courses on hand spinning and weaving from beginner through to the more advanced are run regularly. On top of this we have a number of associated crafts including natural dying, patchwork, felting, sewing, handicrafts and knitting.

Sewing and knitting courses are also available and have become very popular. All our groups meet up at different times throughout the week in Steeple Ashton. We welcome visitors and are happy to show potential members around.

Our guild programme, where we have talks, workshops and skills days is held on the third Saturday of the month. Members from all groups can get together and learn in depth about other crafts, attend workshops or just be inspired. This year we have talks and workshops on nalbinding, dyeing with fungi and sericulture, to name but a few.

Our members are very creative and produce a variety of high-quality hand-crafted item. They have the opportunity to sell their creations at our sales or put them on show in our exhibition. The 2022 Christmas fair was particularly successful, and we are hoping to hold an exhibition this summer.

During the pandemic an online programme was created using Zoom, where talks, workshops and challenges kept members in touch and able to learn new crafts from the safety of their home. Our membership has risen to more than 100 since the pandemic with many new members now setting time aside to learn these crafts. In particular our spinning, weaving and sewing courses have increased in popularity.

Our new website was launched at the start of the pandemic with information can be accessed by members keeping them informed and up to date on what is going on within the guild. A quarterly newsletter, written by members, is accessed on our website.

The guild programme includes talks, workshops and practical skills events and the chance to learn a variety of different crafts.

Quite a few of our members have joined us since retiring as they now have time to pursue new crafts and they quickly become quite proficient. Our members are a very friendly bunch who make any visitor very welcome. Do come along and see us. WL

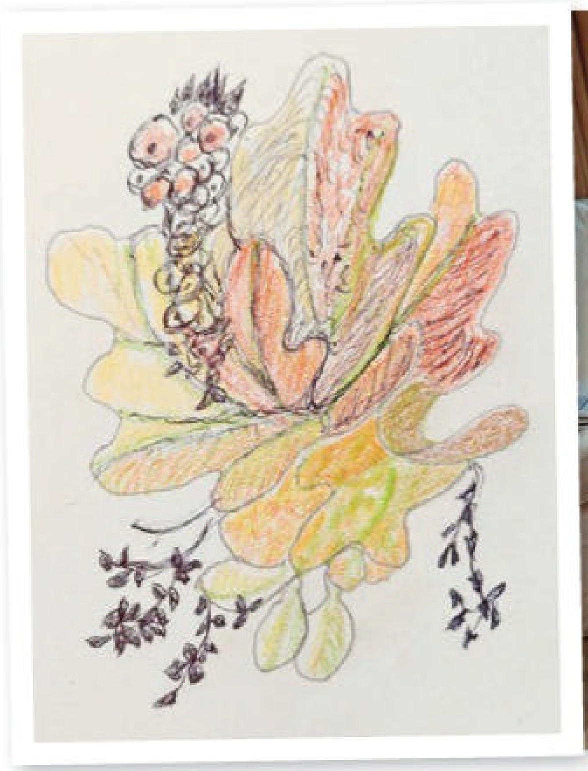
- *More information can be found at wiltshireguildswd.org or by email at: wiltshireguild@gmail.com*

Useful information

Membership costs £60 for a year which entitles the member to attend as many groups as they wish. On top of this £3 is paid per session to cover refreshments, heating and other costs.

Creativity helps overcome isolation

A project spawned in lockdown to combat loneliness was so successful it has continued to bring artists and writers together with older people to unlock their creative spirit.



CREATIVE CONVERSATIONS is one of the strands of activity delivered by Celebrating Age Wiltshire (CAW), a five-year county wide culture and heritage project supporting isolated older people's wellbeing through engaging in creative pursuits.

Creative producer Rebecca Seymour explains: "It was originally a response to the pandemic and began with artists and trained volunteers having conversations with isolated older people on the phone, to keep their interests and enthusiasm for creative activity while they were alone and not able to be visited by anyone.

"The artists were amazingly skilled at supporting their participants over the phone – writing poetry, journal keeping, writing songs about their lives and even recording a *Desert Island Discs* programme. The volunteers followed up with wellbeing calls and even rose to the challenge of creating things themselves to share by post to their participants between sessions."

Endings poem

When you get to be old you think about
things ending –
Out, out brief candle.
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more
and it seems as though some things need
to be expressed in poetry
so I wrote about endings at the station
and put the poem in the biscuit tin where
we keep chocolate
because I was eating chocolate when I
wrote it
but although we listen to Chris Packham
talking about mindfulness
I have to tell you that now that I can't find
the poem or the biscuit tin..

Once the lockdowns were over there was still demand for activity at home and the referrals from social prescribers, community connectors and family members kept on coming. Creative Conversations continued but with artists working face-to-face in participants' own homes and volunteers still on the phone.

Morag and Harry Owen, a couple who are isolated at home due to mobility issues, were referred to the programme in April 2022 by their daughter.

"It was a very good idea for us to have new things to think about and to be distracted from our little world," says Harry. "Our life has become very insular, and this was not a good thing."

Writer and poet Dawn Gorman began working with the Owens in their home, supported by volunteer Melanie MacLaine making fortnightly phone calls.

Says Dawn: "I think the discussions between us made the Owens feel 'involved with life' again, after Covid restrictions and their own mobility issues made it impossible for them to keep up with community activities such as their much-loved local book group."

Morag, who has previously written poetry and children's fiction, seemed to re-find her love of literature and enthusiasm about her own creative abilities thanks to the writing challenges we set each other and our chats about books and authors.

Harry Owen, a keen artist and nature lover taking part in the Noticing Nature programme.

"Harry re-found lots of social confidence in having a new audience for his seemingly endless stock of memorised literary quotes and, as he put it, having the chance to think about things unconnected with the 'everyday necessities'," says Dawn.

Melanie also joined in the challenge of writing poems and shared them with Dawn and the Owens. This led to a printed booklet of all the thought provoking and inspiring poems written during this project, entitled *Candles,* which has been displayed in libraries and the Owens have given to family and friends.

As Harry is a keen painter and nature lover, the couple also took part in another strand of CAW's programme in September 2022, called Noticing Nature, hosting art sessions in their home with local artists James Aldridge and Rachel Heard. Some of the artwork produced by the couple is also included in the booklet, along with photos of them at work in their home.

The couple agreed that the sessions had helped their wellbeing a lot and said it had made them feel "not forgotten".

Artist James Aldridge says: "I hope that what we are offering is an opportunity to be seen and heard, to feel that they are not forgotten, and that they will always have something of value to share with the world."

- *For more information about Celebrating Age Wiltshire email CAWSupport@Wiltshiremusic.org.uk or call 07955 249 288.*

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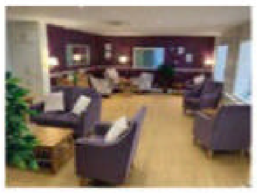

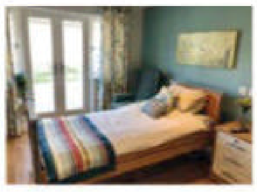

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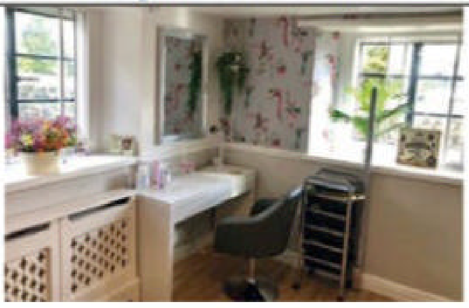

It's still rock and roll to me

Musicians are bringing comfort and connection to people in care homes and memory cafes who are living with dementia and Alzheimer's. Gary Lawrence spoke to one about why they do it.

THERE ARE few musicians who would gaze out at their audience mid-set and take some satisfaction in seeing some of them sound asleep – but when performing for Wiltshire Rural Music's Keep Music In Mind project it's seen as a bonus.

"When they fall asleep it is quite nice because it shows they are relaxed," says pianist, singer and songwriter Daisy Chapman, who is talking about the soothing effect of a familiar tune on audiences in care homes and memory cafes, at whom the project is aimed.

She is one of a band of musicians who perform two or three times a month, using much-loved hits and popular singalongs to make a connection with people who struggle to make sense of life.

"It's really, really lovely, such a special thing," says Daisy, who has been with the charity for almost a year as a performer and a press officer. "Some of the gigs I've played have been really varied. I've played at a couple of care homes where to begin with people are milling around and no one really knows who you are or what you are doing.

"The staff gather everyone together, sit them down and pour them a cup of tea and everyone is still a little confused. But the minute you start playing a couple of eyebrows are raised, silence falls and they either tap their feet along, clap along or join in."

Daisy, who has performed around the world as a solo artist and as a pianist and backing vocalist for Prog Rock band Crippled Black Phoenix supporting Deep Purple and New Model Army, says it's less of a performance and more a hope to break through into the audience's consciousness for a few brief moments.

"It's a different kind of performance but you invariably do make a connection, whether it's from the smallest thing like eye contact and a smile or an attempt at applause to singing along," she says. "Some of the songs I thought they'd sing along to they didn't, and some of those I didn't think they'd respond to, they did."

The notion of playing to a care home or memory café conjures up images of singalongs to old time music hall favourites or Vera Lynn but today's residents are children of the Summer of Love and beyond, so the music has to resonate.

"We are picking songs from the 60s and 70s as they are the ones from their era," she says. "Throw in some Beatles, Stones or Van Morrison they are loving that – we have to play what they want."

Despite armed with the Fab Four and *Jumping Jack Flash*, Daisy admits to stage fright the first time she unfolded her keyboard. "I've toured the world performing my own songs on my own or as part of a band but this was an entirely different audience and I was quite nervous," she recalls.

"I was playing some songs I had only half worked out but I quickly realised that if I

Above: Guitarist Chris making a musical connection at a memory café in Bradford on Avon.

Right: Memory café members enjoying a performance in Bradford on Avon.

Above: Pianist, songwriter and singer Daisy Chapman, who works and performs with Wiltshire Rural Music.

made a mistake, which I often do, it's a very forgiving audience. Sometimes you don't get a lot of response, but you know it is going in and they are enjoying it. You can see that there is no way it is an unpleasant thing for them."

Although her repertoire wouldn't look out of place on a *Top of the Pops* tribute, she occasionally throws in some curve balls and is often surprised at the reaction. "Show tunes are often popular so at the memory café in the church at Bradford on Avon I tried *Secret Love* from *Calamity Jane*, which was sung by Doris Day. They all joined in and it was a really lovely moment. Someone filmed it so I put the video up on Instagram and it has had nearly 30,000 views."

The impact of the music can also have unexpected results. "There was one care home I did earlier this year where one lady was very vocal before but throughout the whole thing she was singing along, tapping her feet and clapping and at the end the staff said it was the longest she had ever sat still for," says Daisy, now a part of Anglo-Swedish prog rock outfit Venus Principle and planning to tour in Europe this year.

While the music can build a bond between performer and audience it can also make for a richer experience for the family and loved ones who are there as well. "At the Alzheimer's Support café in Trowbridge they all got up and danced, it was great," recalls Daisy. "And at the café in Bradford on Avon just in front of me was a lady who used to be a jazz singer sitting with her son who was holding her hand and her voice was soaring above everything."

There was also a touching insight into how powerful family visits are for residents at a care home in Wingfield, near Trowbridge. "Visiting hours started half way through my set," recalls Daisy. "It was a wonderful moment when the partners and families came in. Their loved ones were all with them and joining in with singing along as well and that choked me a little bit. It was so lovely to see something they look forward to every day."

Musicians are paid for appearing but the care homes and cafes get the service for free, thanks to the charity's donors and its own fundraising efforts. "It's a good gig for the musicians and a good gig for the care homes," says Daisy.

"We've built up a really decent database of musicians with instrumentalists as well as vocalists. We have an oboe player who comes in with all her instruments and demonstrates them, so it's a bit of a masterclass as well. That works well in the memory cafes.

"The care homes always want us to come back and we are always looking for new musicians because we try not to send the same people back to the same place – although some of them are requested to return."

Founded in 1933 as the Wiltshire Rural Music School, the charity became Wiltshire Rural Music Service in 2018 but continues to support live music and music workshops across the county. It is based in Gloucester Road, Trowbridge, where it has a performance space. That space welcomes the public every second Wednesday of the month at midday to its Tune at Noon concert.

"It's a good way of supporting us," says Daisy. "We charge a small fee on the door but you get unlimited tea, coffee and cake and just get to listen for an hour to whoever we have playing that day. We've had a drum group, a choir and we have pianists, clarinetists and vocalists – it's a great introduction to music in an informal setting."

The money will help keep projects like Keep Music in Mind running. Says Daisy: "It's a lovely project that the musicians and audiences really seem to enjoy because we all know, especially with Alzheimer's, music brings people out of their shell and unlocks memories.

"What I love about it is that the music is so empowering and just waiting for their reactions and not knowing whether I am going to be laughing or crying by the end is really special."

Find out more about the charity's work at wiltshireruralmusic.co.uk. Follow Daisy Chapman at daisychapman.com and @daisychapmanmusic on Instagram.

Blended families

How can you ensure that your wishes are followed both during your lifetime and on your death? Andrew Langbridge from Wansbroughs has the following advice.

BLENDED FAMILIES (families where one or both parents are in their second marriage or civil partnership, perhaps with children from previous relationships) are increasingly common in the UK. Here is a guide to legal services and how to best plan for the future.

Lasting powers of attorney (LPAs)

Making LPAs can help to ensure that your wishes are followed during your lifetime.

LPAs allow you to appoint people (attorneys) to make decisions on your behalf when you can no longer make those decisions yourself. You can appoint family members, friends or professionals as your attorneys but whoever you appoint should be competent, reliable and trustworthy. Your attorneys must always act in your best interests.

There are two types of LPA. An LPA for property and financial affairs allows your attorneys to make decisions about your home, bank accounts, stocks and shares. An LPA for health and welfare allows your attorneys to make decisions about your daily routine and the medical treatment (including life-sustaining treatment) you receive.

You can include guidance in your LPAs on how you would like your attorneys to make decisions on your behalf. Guidance can take the form of preferences (things your attorneys should consider) or instructions (things your attorneys must do) but any guidance should be carefully drafted to avoid your LPAs becoming unworkable. A solicitor can help in this regard.

Even if you include guidance in your LPAs, it is a good idea to discuss your wishes with your attorneys so that they know them before you become unable to make decisions for yourself.

Will

Making a will is the best way to ensure that your wishes are followed on your death.

You might have recently made a will; however, you should check that it is still valid. This is because, under current rules, marriage or formation of a civil partnership automatically revokes a will. The only exception to this rule is where the will contains wording to the effect that it was made in expectation of marriage or formation of a civil partnership and was not intended to be revoked by that marriage or civil partnership. If your will is valid, you should review it nonetheless to ensure that it still records your wishes. If you have not made a will or your will has been revoked, you should consider how to structure your will to provide for your spouse or civil partner and other family members.

Outright

You could leave your estate to your spouse or civil partner outright. It would then form part of their estate and pass under their will on their death. You should be aware, however, that your spouse or civil partner could change their Will after your death. This means that your estate may not ultimately pass to the people you intended it to.

Above: Put a plan in place for all the family.

Next steps

- Consider making lasting powers of attorney appointing people to make decisions about your finances and welfare when you can no longer make those decisions yourself.
- If you have a will, check that it is still valid and records your wishes.
- If you do not have a will or need to make a new one, consider how you would like to provide for your spouse or civil partner and other family members.
- Discuss your wishes with your family and anyone else you think should know about them.

Life interest trust

You could leave your estate to a life interest trust for your spouse or civil partner. This means that your spouse or civil partner would be able to benefit from your estate during their lifetime but, on their death, your estate would pass to others such as your children from a previous relationship. During their lifetime, your spouse or civil partner would be able to live in any property forming part of your estate and to receive the income from any other assets such as bank accounts, stocks and shares. You could give your trustees (normally but not necessarily your executors) power to pass assets to your spouse or civil partner outright if they (your trustees) think it fit to do so.

A life interest trust could ensure that your estate ultimately passes to the people you intend it to. A life interest trust may also protect your estate from care fees as it would not form part of your spouse or civil partner's estate and should not therefore be taken into consideration when assessing your spouse or civil partner for local authority funded care. There is no guarantee that this will remain the case though. You should be aware, however, that trusts can be administratively complex. For example, since 1 September 2022, all trusts have been required to register with HM Revenue and Customs through its Trust Registration Service whether or not they produce a tax liability.

Discretionary trust

You could leave your estate to a discretionary trust. This means that no person would be entitled to benefit from your estate. Instead, your trustees would have discretion as to whom, from a class of potential beneficiaries, should benefit and how. You could write a letter to accompany your Will setting out how you would like your trustees to exercise their discretion, however, such a letter of wishes would not be binding on your trustees who could distribute your estate differently if they think it fit to do so. A discretionary trust affords maximum flexibility, however, as with a life interest trust, it can be administratively complex.

A note on inheritance tax

You may know that your estate is entitled to a nil rate band of £325,000. This means that the first £325,000 of your estate is free of inheritance tax. What you may not know is that your estate could qualify for an additional residence nil rate band of £175,000. To qualify for the residence nil rate band, an interest in a property that has been your home at some point during your period of ownership must pass to your descendants (children, grandchildren etc.) on your death. For these purposes, "descendants" include step relations and so your estate could still qualify for the residence nil rate band if you leave your home to your spouse or civil partner's children on your death.

However you choose to structure your will, it is a good idea to discuss your wishes with your family during your lifetime to avoid surprising or upsetting them on your death. WL

• *If you would like further information about anything in this article, Wansbroughs is here to help. Please contact the Private Client Team on 01380 733300 or at wealth@wansbroughs.com.*

Discover how to retire well

Will your pension be enough to live on when you retire? Fiona Morrison, a chartered financial planner at Francis Clark Financial Planning in Salisbury, explores the key questions to consider as you approach retirement

MANY PEOPLE have reconsidered their work-life balance during the pandemic. We are seeing more clients looking to retire earlier, as well as people wanting to reduce their working hours and use their pensions to make up for the reduction in earnings. Retirement doesn't have to mean a full stop to work, but how do you know what you want to do is affordable?

Key questions to consider

Do I want to fully retire?
Many people decide to phase their retirement over a few years. Purchasing an annuity (a fixed income which can increase with inflation and/or be passed to a surviving spouse if you die) and taking defined benefits may not be the best option if you are continuing to work. You may want more flexibility to change your pension income based on fluctuations in your pay.

Some people, such as farmers, never really retire. They might step back from the day to day running of the business or do administrative instead of physical work in their later years, but they still receive drawings or have costs covered by the business if they live on the farm. Pension savings may not need to be accessed or may be used to reduce drawings from the business.

Do I need to pay off the mortgage with my retirement funds?
Check the balance on your mortgage statement. Will you have paid it off before your desired retirement date? Could you afford to overpay, and are you allowed to? Often you can overpay by 10% a year, reducing the outstanding balance and the amount of interest you will pay. Think about what size of lump sum you might need to clear the outstanding mortgage.

What income will I need in retirement? How will that change as I get older?
During the early years of retirement, your spending may stay the same or reduce. This is the time when people often want to travel more or pursue interests they put on the backburner while working. In later life, we tend to be less able to travel and so costs go down. Finally, you may need care if your health fails and this can significantly increase your costs again.

How much state pension will I receive?
You can obtain a state pension forecast to see when you will reach state pension age and how much you may receive. It will also give you an idea of missed National Insurance contributions that you could make to ensure a full state pension.

The state pension is a valuable secure income and is currently guaranteed to increase each year by the higher of inflation (Consumer Prices Index), average earnings or 2.5%. If you choose to defer taking it, you will get an enhanced state pension.

What investments and income other than pensions do you have to fund your retirement?
Cash savings, rental incomes, investment income and dividends from companies can all be part of a tax efficient solution.

Accessing your pension

Generally, the earliest you can access your pension is currently age 55. This is due to rise to 57 from April 2028.

Pension rules currently allow you to withdraw 25% of your fund tax free, with further withdrawals being taxable.

Pension freedoms legislation introduced in 2015 broadened the ways you can access your retirement savings. Here is a rundown of the options available depending on the type of pension you have:

Personal pensions or Self-Invested Personal Pensions (SIPPs)
You could:

- purchase an annuity
- leave the pension invested and do not draw anything – you can do this indefinitely
- leave the pension invested and draw a lump sum which is 25% tax-free cash and 75% taxable pension income
- leave the pension invested but take some of the pension funds regularly or as you need the money

Fiona's top pensions tips

- If you are unable to track down old pensions by contacting the provider or your former employer, you can use the Pension Tracing Service by calling 0800 731 0193 or visiting www.findpensioncontacts.service.gov.uk
- Think about what you want to do in retirement and how that may change over time
- Consider the cost of care. In Wiltshire this could be up to £1,500 per week per person
- Consider how long your pension needs to last. To get an idea, try using the life expectancy calculator on the Office for National Statistics website
- Get a state pension forecast by visiting www.gov.uk/check-state-pension

Workplace pensions (such as Nest, The People's Pension or a group personal pension)
You could transfer to a flexible access drawdown pension or take tax-free cash and purchase an annuity.

Public service and government pension schemes (and some legacy company pensions)
These provide certainty over the income you will receive in retirement. They can be defined benefit or career average retirement earnings schemes – or both. These often have normal retirement ages of 60 or 65. Currently you can still take your pension from age 55, but there may be a penalty for accessing the scheme early, meaning a lower income. Your options are:

- take the full pension
- take a reduced pension and a tax-free lump sum
- some schemes allow you to take partial retirement
- for any other flexible options, you would need to transfer to a personal pension scheme and give up the secure benefits*

Retirement annuity contracts or Section 32 buyout bonds
These are legacy schemes and often have some element of guarantee included in them, such as a guaranteed minimum pension. Your options are:

- Take the pension income
- Transfer to a flexible access drawdown pension*

* It's worth noting that any pension pot worth over £30,000 can only be transferred following advice from an appropriately qualified and regulated financial adviser. This is because you would be giving up an income guaranteed for your lifetime.

A financial adviser can help you navigate your way to the best option for you and explain the financial jargon. WL

Retirement planning in practice – a case study

- Kirsty is 52 and her children are all financially independent (other than the usual Bank of Mum). She has worked full time and is earning £120,000 a year. She has a company pension, and a number of other pensions from previous employers.

- Kirsty has always wanted to see Australia but couldn't justify a month or more off work. She estimates £25,000 will be needed to cover this dream trip.

- With no mortgage, Kirsty plans to downsize now her children have grown up, releasing an estimated £100,000 after costs. She is in good health and her parents are still living independently.

- I completed a financial forecast with Kirsty, agreeing assumptions for interest rates and inflation, then stress testing this to model the impact of a stock market crash and her needing care in later life. This highlighted that she could afford to retire at 55 on an income of £30,000 a year, based on a combination of her pension funds, the equity released by downsizing if invested wisely and her other savings, including an emergency fund of £10,000.

- We could then consolidate her previous pensions and maximise contributions into her company pension, which will help reduce her income tax bill and build her retirement funds. She is now looking forward to retirement and planning her trip to Australia.

Why it's important to take a hearing test

Hearing tests are an important part of maintaining good overall health, but many people put them off or ignore the signs of hearing loss. Dominic Tavarez from Andrew Bird Hearing Limited says this is a mistake because untreated hearing loss can really impact your quality of life.

ONE OF the main ways a hearing test can improve your quality of life is through the use of hearing aids. They have come a long way in recent years and are no longer the big, unsightly devices they used to be. Modern hearing aids are small, discreet, and can be customised to fit your specific hearing needs and preferences.

Hearing aids work by amplifying sound waves, making it easier for people with hearing loss to hear and understand what is being said. This can have a big impact on a person's social and professional life allowing them to communicate better and participate in group conversations and meetings.

Hearing aids do more than just improve the ability to hear and communicate. They can also help prevent further hearing loss by protecting the remaining healthy cells in the ear. When someone with hearing loss strains to hear, it can lead to more damage to the cells in their ear, which can lead to even more severe hearing loss. By using a hearing aid, you can protect your remaining healthy cells and prevent further deterioration of your hearing.

Alongside the physical benefits, there are also psychological benefits, people with untreated hearing loss often feel isolated and lonely as they struggle to participate in social situations and feel left out of conversations. With a hearing aid you can engage with others and feel included in social situations.

The benefits of a hearing test go beyond just the use of hearing aids. It can also detect other issues with ear health, such as infections or wax build-up. By identifying and treating these issues, you can maintain good overall ear health and prevent further complications.

It is important to note that hearing loss is a common problem, and it can affect people of all ages. In fact, it is estimated that around 10 million people in the UK have some degree of hearing loss. If you think you or someone you love may be experiencing hearing loss, don't wait to get a hearing test. The sooner you get your hearing checked, the sooner you can take steps to address any issues and maintain good ear health.

Regular hearing tests will help to spot any issues and to maintain good ear health.

Finally, hearing tests are important for maintaining good overall health and can make a big difference to your quality of life. Modern hearing aids are small, discreet, and customisable and can greatly improve your ability to hear and communicate.

In addition to the physical and psychological benefits of using a hearing aid, hearing tests can also detect and treat other ear health issues.

If you think you or someone you love may be experiencing hearing loss, don't wait to get a hearing test. The sooner you get your hearing checked, the sooner you can take steps to address any issues and maintain good ear health.

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Crisis in care is holding back our NHS

Anne-Marie Perry, chair of care provider Abicare, writes about the social care crisis that is contributing to the pressure bearing down on the NHS – and how it could be tackled.

The importance of being a good neighbour was highlighted during the pandemic.

ABICARE HAS had an incredibly busy year again. It seems to be the norm that the NHS is short of staff, there are no carers in the community to help get people out of hospital and social care is on its knees.

Our challenge is to destress the industry. Carers love what they do, in fact anyone who has a sense of community and "giving back" would love social care. In days of old this really was about raising a smile and delivering a service that had a social impact. Increasingly, our social care provision requires a more complex input, which in turn requires a higher-skilled workforce and the pay doesn't reflect the responsibility; there's is a huge disconnect.

When you hear that the three key reasons for hospitalisation in the elderly are isolation, poor nutrition, and poor handling of medication, it is easy to see what can be done to alleviate the NHS budgets. We need to give our elderly time and companionship.

Anyone with the right values who cares about their neighbour will do this. We need to provide help with meals- this is not so much about cooking for our elderly but giving them a reason to cook for themselves and enjoy the social aspects of sharing a meal.

How many of us have heard our elderly mother or grandmother say "it isn't really worth cooking for one"? Again, there is a great deal we can do as "good neighbours," such as sharing a meal or encouraging someone in our road to join us.

We saw a million volunteers coming to the fore during Covid and many of them helped with exactly these challenges. If you are home alone 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the best part of 52 weeks a year, you have no "hooks"; nothing to tell you it's the weekend, nothing to remind you what day it is and nothing to look forward to as each day blends into the next.

> 'These are small steps that will make a big difference'

These are the elements of social care I believe have been lost. With the population increasing and not enough money to go round we only have time and money for the necessities – the more complex needs of any of those needing help in the community.

If we start to engage earlier and deal with the isolation and meals, we will save the NHS budget significantly and we can all do our part. We can help that elderly neighbour by taking them into town, having them round for a meal or sharing a gin and tonic. These are small steps that will make a big difference.

This leads us to another challenge – staff. Carers are supposedly a rare breed, except in reality any one of us who has looked after a child or elderly parent has been a carer in some form or other, it's in our DNA.

All we need to do is reconnect. As providers we have too many hours spread over too small a workforce, so we need more manpower in the community to alleviate the pressure. This will reduce the strain, the challenges and the exhaustion.

It really wouldn't take much if every one of us gave two to 10 hours a week at the times required, usually early morning, evenings and weekends, then we could help clear our hospitals and ease the current strain.

If you think you can do your part, please get in touch. Give something back to your community and really make 2023 count.

- *Find out more about Abicare at abicare.co.uk*

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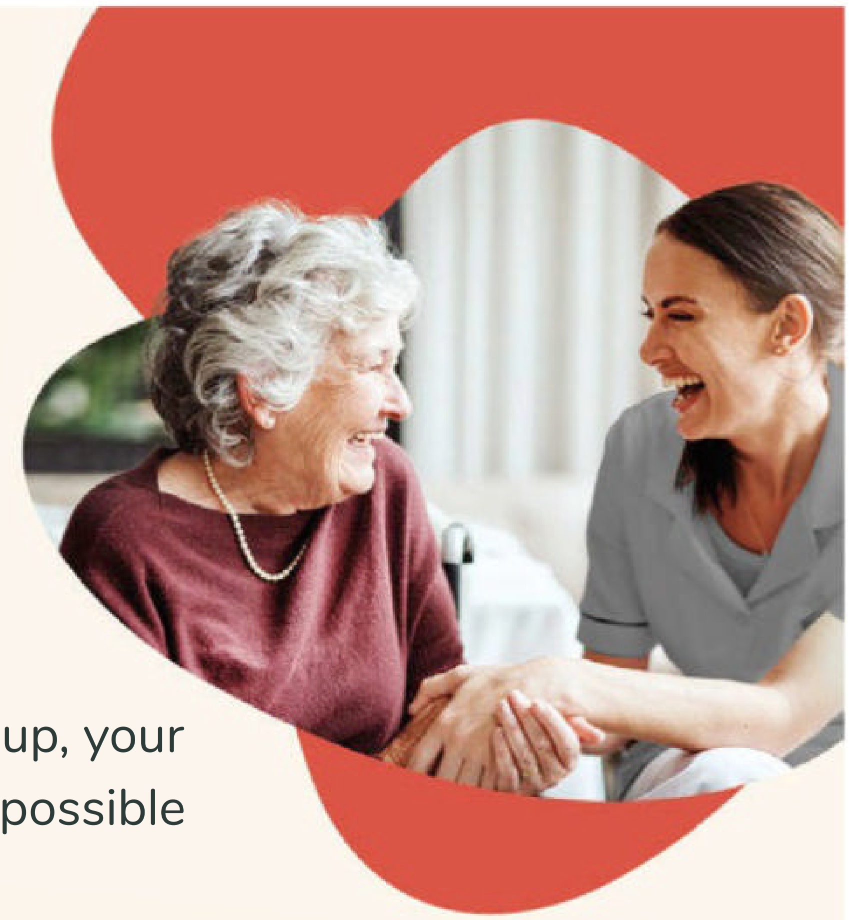

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The team at Ridgeway Rise understand a great family makes a house a home; taking great care to ensure residents retain connections to their loved ones and build relationships with family and friends, as well as enjoying the community and companionship of fellow residents and staff.

- *To find out more about Ridgeway Rise, visit www.ridgewayrise.co.uk or call 01793 378 872*

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Right: Andrew Bird and Liam Halliday.

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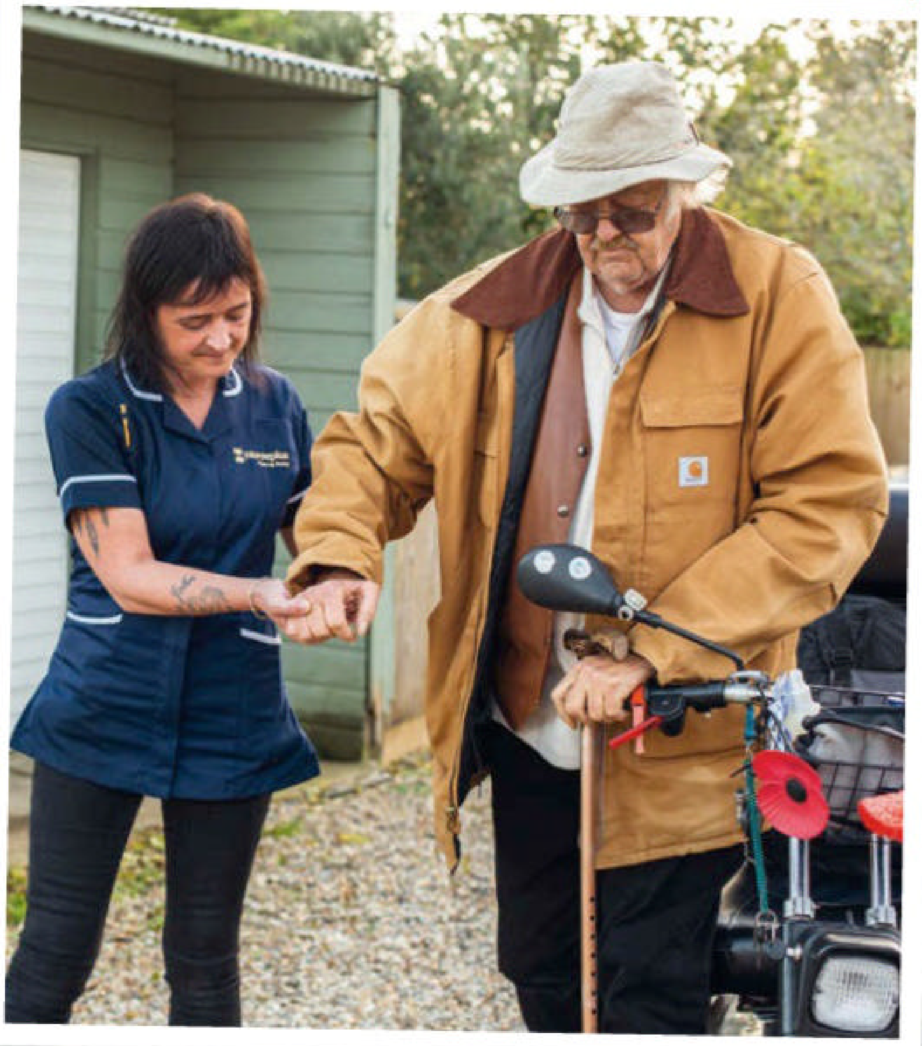

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Wansbroughs has been providing expert legal advice to individuals and businesses in Wiltshire, and beyond for more than 140 years.

The firm provides a wide range of legal services and has developed a commendable reputation for producing work often associated with larger city practices.

Services include advice and support in relation to Wills, Tax, Trusts & Probate, Commercial Property, Residential Property, Business & Corporate, Family, Relationship Breakdown, Farming & Agriculture, Employment & HR, Dispute Resolution, and Personal Injury Litigation.

Wansbroughs is frequently listed in the Legal 500 directory with numerous individuals regarded as a *Recommended Lawyer* within the guide. Many of the firm's lawyers trained and practiced at prestigious firms in London and Bristol prior to Wansbroughs, bringing with them a wealth of knowledge and experience to the firm.

Wansbroughs is focused on building long-term relationships with the people and businesses of Wiltshire, often working with generations of the same family over many years.

The firm's head office is in Devizes with a further satellite office in London's Liberty House.

- *01380 733300, mail@wansbroughs.com www.wansbroughs.com*

1st Choice Stairlifts – safety at home

The Covid-19 pandemic has taken its toll in many ways, particularly on the health and wellbeing of older people. In May 2021, Age UK found that 2.8 million over 60s now struggle climbing stairs, versus the 1.2 million before the first lockdown in March 2020. It may be likely that either you or someone you know is not safe when climbing the stairs at home.

Here at 1st Choice Stairlifts, our priority is keeping customers safe in their own homes by reducing hazards that could cause life-changing trips and falls, resulting in hospital admissions. We can fit a lift in every home and suit the needs of every individual because of the exceptional range of stairlift and home lift models we offer.

An independent study found that having a stairlift or vertical home lift installed can delay care home admission by four to seven years. It is for this reason exactly that we work towards helping people regain their independence, while at the same time reducing the number of people in hospitals and care homes, which is especially vital in today's climate.

- *To find out how a lift can help you or your loved one telephone: 01249 814528 www.1stchoicestairlifts.com*

Supporting independent living

Barchester Healthcare is one of the UK's largest care providers supporting older people living independent lives with dignity and respect. Providing a wide range of services for a variety of needs, Barchester Healthcare supports over 12,500 residents across 250 homes and hospitals for short breaks to long term stays.

A leading care provider over the last 30 years, Barchester services include residential care and nursing care tailored to the individual. Barchester also provides expert dementia care. Many Barchester homes feature a Memory Lane Community, which is a dedicated part of the home designed to support residents who are living with various stages of Alzheimer's or dementia, to stay as independent and active as possible. Barchester has six independent mental health hospitals that offer functional and organic mental health services.

At Barchester, we celebrate life and make sure the people we support do too. Our teams of well-trained staff focus on the individual needs of each resident and are passionate about independence, dignity and choice for all residents in their care. We employ motivated, attentive staff, who are committed to a high standard of care.

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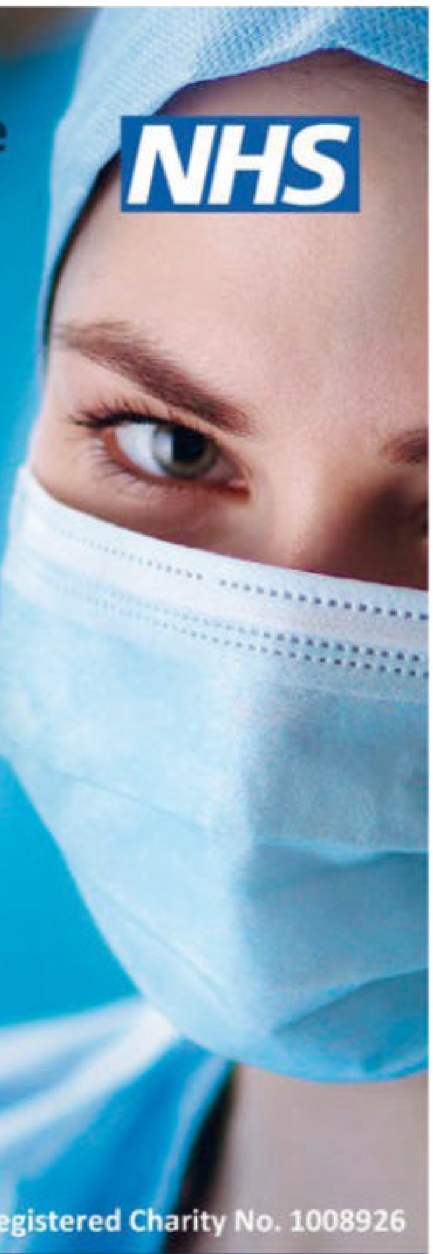

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From gardening club to seated Zumba and trips around the local area, our dedicated activity coordinator ensures that everyone keeps active, entertained, and connected to the local community.

Dating back to the 18th Century, the lovingly restored oak-panelled dining room offers a unique dining experience, with delicious, nutritionally balanced homecooked food.

The majority of our beautifully appointed rooms have views of our delightful garden, which is home to many alfresco celebrations during the summer months.

We understand the challenges and concerns you may be facing while searching for care, but we are here to help.

- *Please contact us with any questions you may have about your care requirements or to organize a respite stay to experience life at Wren House. Call 01985 801 013 or email wrenhouse.manager@wrenretirementliving.co.uk*

Returning home after a stay in hospital?

For people who are recently discharged from hospital changes in ability can arise that make yesterday's straightforward tasks todays challenges. From bathing and toileting, to making a cup of tea, to getting out of the house and maintaining independence, it can be a challenge for recently discharged patients to adjust to life with limited mobility even down to finding shoes and slippers that fit swollen feet.

As we discovered on our recent visit to the Wroughton branch, The Mobility Store has a surprisingly wide and varied range of products, from simple grabbers to fully automated bath lifts, making life easier if you suddenly find yourself less spritely on your feet and they can even arrange for short term stairlift hire and hospital beds if needed.

If it's just a temporary injury all the stores have wheelchairs, knee walkers and mobility scooters available for immediate hire or purchase, as well as things you might not consider such as waterproof bandage/cast protectors and stools for when you bathe or shower, overbed/chair tables, special cutlery as well as crutches, walking sticks and rollators.

All The Mobility Store's four branches have level access parking right outside for easy access, and their staff have the experience to advise on any future needs that may arise should your mobility continue to be an issue.

- *www.thehearingandmobilitystore.co.uk Telephone: 01793 815083*

Whatever your care needs, Abicare can help

Abicare was based on the foundation of providing excellent and innovative care - What initially started as a family run business has grown considerably - These foundations mean that we understand the concerns you or your family may have when it comes to receiving care, so we want to make sure that you feel reassured every step of the way.

"We formed Abicare because we wanted to truly make a difference to the way care is delivered- to be the provider of choice for anyone needing Visiting care and Live-in care, with a passionate and dedicated team of staff to make this happen. We take our care responsibilities extremely seriously, and our carers are fantastic individuals who deliver a quality service" Anne-Marie Perry, Chair Abicare

Abicare are fully regulated by the CQC and CIW and has many years of experience.

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Choose the care that fits best with your life and your home, from Visiting care to Live-in care. Stay at home where you can keep your pets and remain in the familiar surroundings you know and love. We are here to help you or your loved ones live with more independence.

- *www.abicare.co.uk*

Create your perfect day here in the county

If you are starting to plan your wedding, here are some local businesses who want to share with you the very best of venues and services on our doorstep.

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Salisbury Medieval Hall

Hidden within the glorious setting of Salisbury Cathedral Close sits a stunning, 850 year old, 'Great Hall' now known as 'Salisbury Medieval Hall'.

Our family (the Waddingtons) has owned and managed The Hall since 1983. It is now one of Salisbury's special venues for music, theatre, opera, exhibitions and also for private functions – especially civil ceremonies for which we were granted a licence 20 years ago.

We have gained invaluable experience helping many couples arrange and manage one of the most important moments of their lives. We regard it as an honour to be involved and help ensure their plans run smoothly.

The venue, itself, is special not only because of its handsome style, particularly the magnificent timber framed roof, but also its flexibility (no two weddings have been the same). We encourage couples to keep in mind the tried and tested traditions of old but, also, to be innovative and to make the occasion their own. Having said that, if we feel something might be impractical or unsuitable, we'll politely say so! Having the rings delivered to a couple by an eagle owl didn't quite go according to plan!

For 20 years civil ceremonies have taken place in the magnificent Salisbury Medieval Hall.

We also suggest that you, and those you have invited to play a role in the ceremony, take part in a rehearsal, conducted by us, usually the day before. This helps to ensure that, from that special moment when the bridal procession starts, everyone is confident and happy to put on that gorgeous wedding ceremony you dreamed of.

- *www.salisburymedievalhall.com*
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Angela Cave, Parrots & Peonies, The Shambles, Devizes.

- *www.angelacave.com*
  Phone: 07305 094535
  Email: cavea23@gmail.com

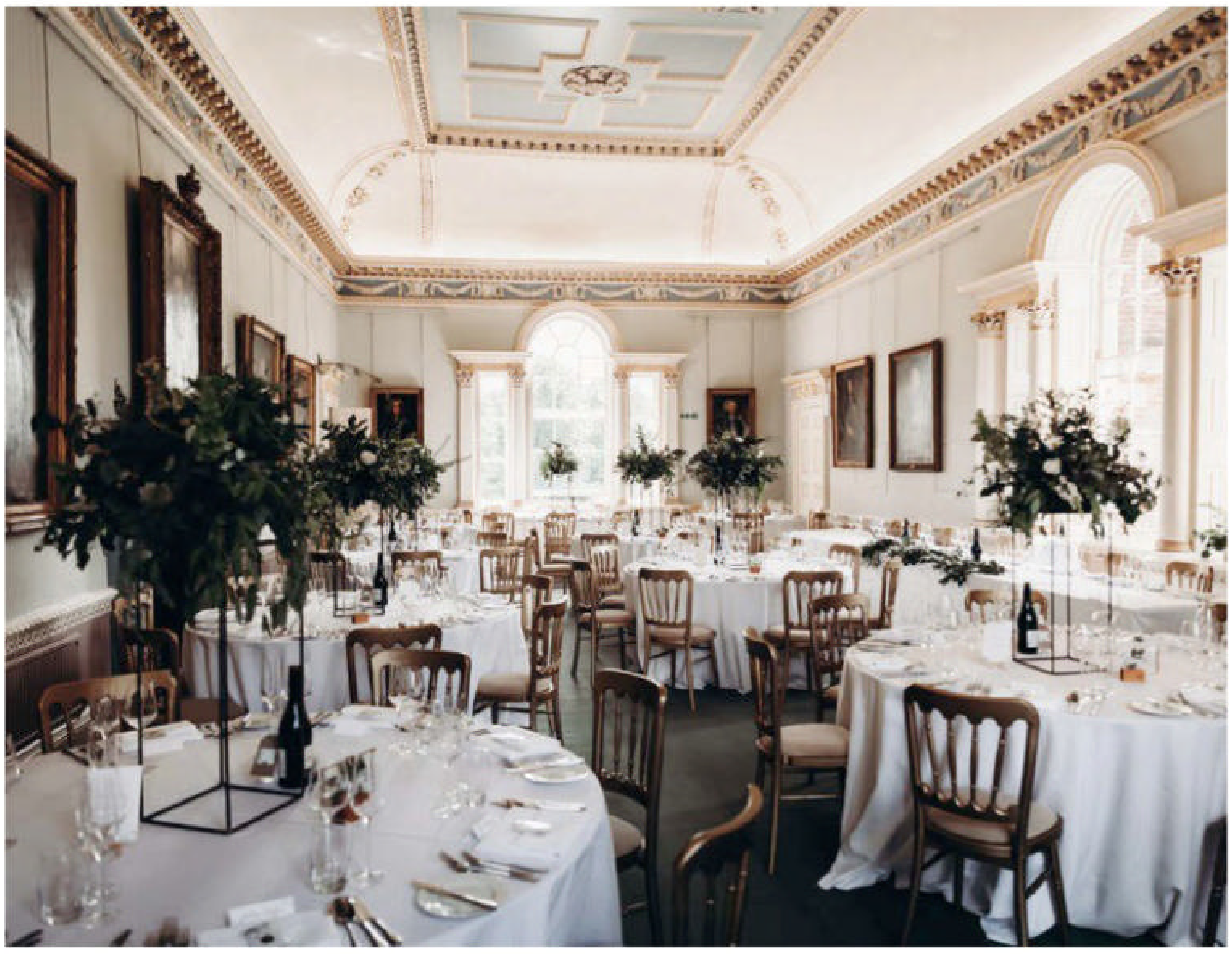
The Bishop's Palace opens for weddings

The Bishop's Palace, the second most important historical building in Salisbury, is opening its doors for wedding receptions. Standing under the spire of its world-famous neighbour, Salisbury Cathedral, the 800 year old Bishop's Palace exudes Hogwarts charm and 27 acres of private grounds hidden in the heart of the city.

Couples keen to host their wedding reception in an unusual, beautiful and historically important venue can reserve the Bishop's Palace - during school holidays only. The venue offers two internal options for receptions as well as opportunity to erect a marquee within the stunning grounds:

- The Bishop's drawing room, affectionately known as the Big School Room or BSR, seats up to 100 people or accommodates up to 120 standing. This striking space is framed by large, arched windows, and is decorated with paintings of former Bishops under an elaborate, stucco decorated ceiling.
- The Undercroft, a mediaeval dining room under a vaulted stone roof, seats 80 people and can accommodate 120 standing.
- Marquees of any size can be erected in grounds to the rear of the Palace.

- *www.salisburycathedralschool.com/Weddings*
  Email: fenn.e@salisburycathedralschool.com
  Phone: 01722 555302



Vivien Sheriff headwear

The multi award winning headwear brand, Vivien Sheriff create bespoke headwear for all occasions and every piece is painstakingly designed and made in their Wiltshire Atelier. They offer couture as well as Ready to Wear and have a large collection that is available to hire.

Vivien told us; "The world's press came to our little corner of Wiltshire following our dressing Kate Middleton for her first official engagement", and for the Royal wedding in April 2011, the Vivien Sheriff brand dressed more heads than any other designer as reported in *The Times* newspaper. Vivien has been honoured to continue to dress many members of the Royal Family, as well as international celebrities.

"The team are now working on the Spring Summer collection, which is stocked in Harrods, Moda Rosa in Alresford, as well as the most prestigious stores in the UK and worldwide. We are looking forward to dressing some very well-known heads for the Coronation of King Charles III in May, and excited that we are collaborating yet again with Royal Ascot in June."

"We thoroughly enjoy looking after our more local customers who bring their outfits to the studio where we have literally hundreds of designs, that we also hire which is very popular as you can imagine"

If you would like to visit the studio please contact us.

- *www.viviensheriff.co.uk*
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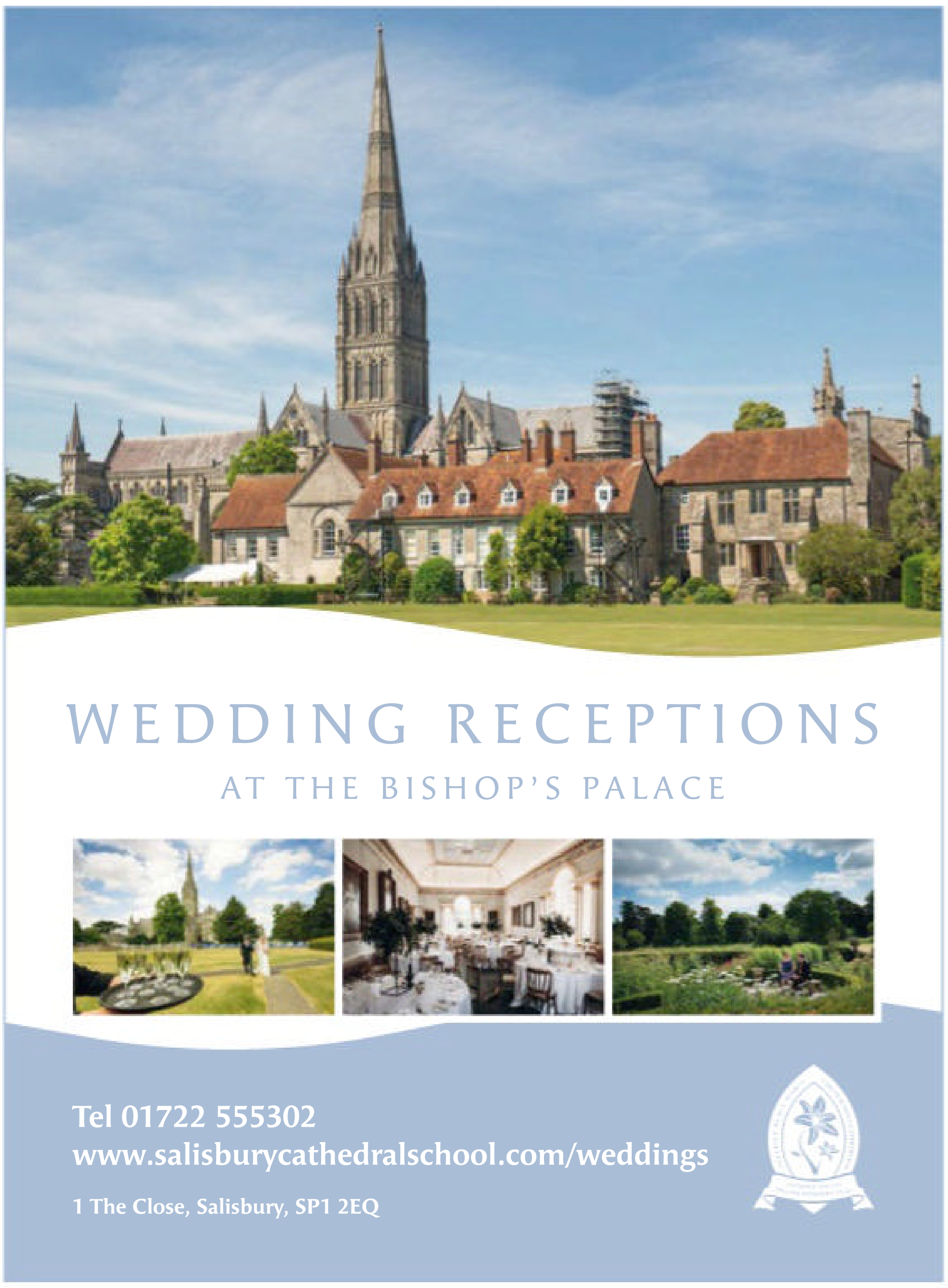

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Serves 4

American style wild venison

The team from Deerbox in Ramsbury share Joe Harding from Farming the Wild's recipe using their venison.

New York Meatball's

A STUNNING DISH which can be enjoyed as a starter with bread, or as a main with pasta, polenta or rice.

It's quick to make, especially if you have made batches of Mike's Tomato and green sauces. Can be used with any species of deer, but this time we've chosen muntjac.

Ingredients

- 500g muntjac mince
- 250g Ricotta cheese
- Generous pinch sea salt and ground black pepper
- Handful parsley, finely chopped
- 400ml Mike's tomato Sauce
- Mike's green sauce (to garnish)

For Mike's tomato sauce:

- 2 tins chopped tomatoes
- 3 finely diced banana shallots
- 1 finely chopped red chilli
- 1 large glug extra virgin olive oil
- 1 finely chopped rosemary sprig
- 4 crushed garlic cloves
- 1 splash white wine
- salt and pepper

For Mike's green sauce:

- 1 large handful roughly chopped rocket
- 1 large handful roughly chopped coriander
- 1 large handful roughly chopped flat leaf parsley
- 1 large handful roughly chopped mint
- 1 large handful roughly chopped basil
- 1 finely chopped banana shallot
- 2 finely chopped garlic cloves
- 1 lemon, juice and zest
- salt and pepper
- extra virgin olive oil

Method:

1. Make the tomato sauce and green sauce ahead of time. They can both be frozen in batches and used with many venison dishes.

2. Thoroughly mix the venison, cheese, salt and pepper, parsley and garlic until evenly combined.

3. Roll the mix between your hands to form 5cm balls. Place on a plate ready for cooking.

4. Heat 400ml of tomato sauce in a pan and add the meatballs (do not sear the meatballs, place in the tomato sauce raw). Simmer on a low heat for 45-60 minutes.

5. Place 2 to 3 meatballs in a dish, spoon over some of the tomato sauce and garnish with the green sauce.

6. Grate a little parmesan cheese over and serve.

For the tomato sauce:

1. Add the oil and shallots to a pan and sweat on a medium heat without browning.

2. Add the garlic, chilli and rosemary and cook for 1 minute. Add the white wine and cook for another 2 minutes.

3. Add the tomatoes and cook for around 1 hour. Season to taste.

For the green sauce:

1. Mix the roughly chopped greens with the garlic, shallot and lemon zest. Add the lemon juice and plenty of olive oil.

2. Blitz in a blender to make a thick, green sauce. Season with plenty of salt and pepper.

Notes: Make a batch of the tomato sauce ahead of time and freeze in batches- it can be used for our pizza recipe and many other pasta dishes. The green sauce is a delicious, punchy addition to grilled meats.

- *www.deerbox.co.uk*
  Telephone: 03333 05 75 35

Winter Rosé

Is rosé just for soporific summer holidays and the warm sunshine? Amidst the shivering season, Grant Berry of Yapp Brothers wine merchants in Mere would beg to differ

OVER THE last couple of decades, the image of rosé has been transformed. No longer just a cheap, quaffable drink, premium rosé sales have skyrocketed. The likes of Brangelina's Château Miraval, Sacha Lichine's Angels series (from Whispering to Rock), and Brits Stephen and Jenny Cronk's Mirabeau have transformed our perceptions of pink wine.

Still largely consumed in summer, I'd like to fly the flag for drinking rosé all-year-round by offering up a selection of fuller-bodied pinks to suit the season. Often darker-hued, the French call such wine *rosé d'hiver* (winter rosé) as they have more concentrated layers of flavour so enhance slow-braised stews, fish pies and the like. In France, these almost-red rosés are referred to as *clairets* from the word *clair* meaning clear or translucent. The term comes from an interesting period in history. From the marriage of Henry Plantagenet (Henry II of England) to Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1152 until the mid-15th century, Bordeaux formed part of the English Crown. Its red wine was much lighter in colour than it is today. This *clairet* wine became known to English merchants and consumers as 'claret' and is now the accepted term for all red wines originating in Bordeaux. *Clairet* now means a dark-hued rosé and is an umbrella word that's used across France.

Starting off in Chinon in the Loire valley, Rudolphe Raffault makes a tasty-coloured rosé from pure Cabernet Franc, a grape growing in popularity for rosé (Yapp Brothers, £13.75). More often recognised in its *rouge* guise, its zingy acidity and pink-grapefruit aromas lead to summer berries on the palate. In the Loire, pork rillettes would be apposite – a coarse paté-like spread, but barbecue pulled-pork is utterly stunning alongside. A more strawberry-scented version from the same grape hails from the heights of Malepère in the Languedoc where Philippe Girard's Pays d'Oc racy rosé has converted many Provençale rosé diehards. Ratatouille or spaghetti Bolognese help it along on the food pairing stakes.

Heading up to the Rhône valley, Tavel is just west of the river itself and lies across the waters from the much-heralded Châteauneuf-du-Pape. One of France's few rosé only *Appellations d'Origine Contrôlée*, its deep salmon-hued wines set itself apart from the pretty pinks of nearby Provence. Feted by King Louis XIV (who seemed to revel in most French wines), the dark and intense dry pinks of the appellation are triumphs of the blender's art.

All wines are based on Grenache in its three forms – Gris, Noir and Blanc with up to an additional nine grapes permitted. In 2022, *Decanter* magazine's Rhône expert Matt Walls hailed Tavel as "the most exciting appellation in the Rhône". With a number of minimal-intervention winemakers setting up to make what they call 'pale reds', it's exciting to see an appellation on the rise. Look out for Château d'Acqueria's Tavel (recently acquired by Rhône stalwart E.Guigal), a blackberry and red cherry-scented example from Clairette, Grenache Noir, Syrah and Cinsault (Hedonism.co.uk, £19.50).

Richard Maby's vines in Tavel, southern Rhône.

I love Richard Maby's Domaine Maby wines which nod to opera in their nomenclature (Prima Donna, Libiamo) though can be tricky to find as only small volumes are made (Prima Donna is sometimes available at the Wine Society, £12.95). It is Richard's 'La Forcadière' bottling of Tavel which truly inspires a dedicated following with its peach-melba aromas, raspberry acidity and crisp, spicy finish. Perfect with Asian-spiced salmon, a creamy fish pie or tuna sashimi (Yapp Brothers, £15.50).

- *www.yapp.co.uk*

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VENUE UPDATE!

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10 March 2023, Devizes Corn Exchange

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We will be presenting awards to the community of Wiltshire, the winners chosen by our respected judges, chaired by Caroline Hole-Jones.

The list of winners remains a closely guarded secret, but all will be revealed at the ceremony. In our close-knit community, you may know some of the winners and perhaps have experienced first-hand how much they have achieved.

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E: awardsteam@markallengroup.com

Nurturing the soil under your feet

Garden designer and beekeeper Sophie Butcher describes how you can do your bit to help draw down carbon dioxide in your garden.

SOIL. EVERY wood, field, garden and plant pot needs it. Yet, according to the United Nations Food & Agriculture Organisation, we have already degraded at least one third of the world's agricultural land, and over 90% could become degraded by 2050.

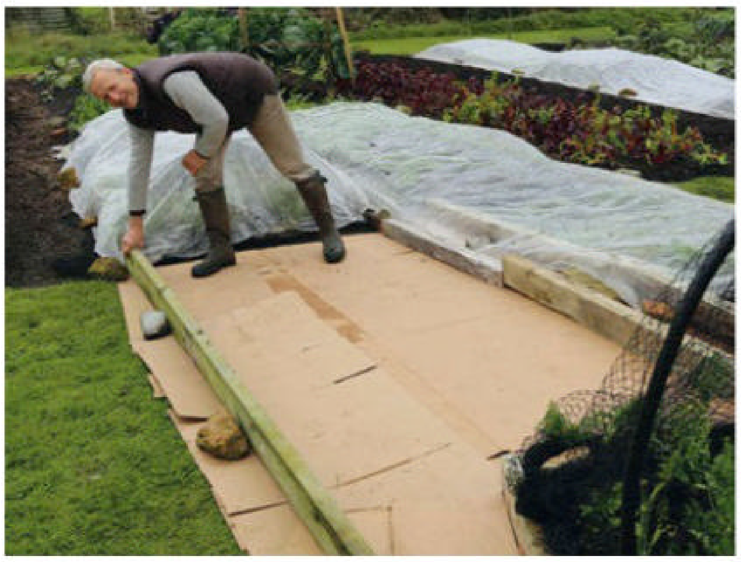
Other highlights from the Global Symposium on Soil Erosion in 2019 include: soil erosion can lead up to 50% loss in crop yields; the equivalent of one soccer pitch of soil is eroded every five seconds; and it can take up to 1,000 years to produce just 2-3cm of soil.

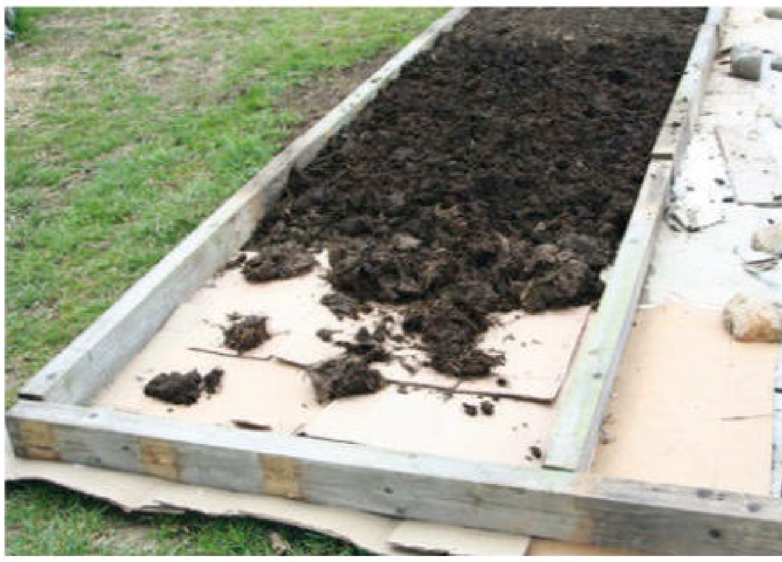
A simple solution

'What if I told you there was a relatively simple, cost-effective way to help feed the world, reduce pollution, pull carbon from the atmosphere, protect biodiversity, and make farmers more money?' wrote Professor David R Montgomery in 2018 at the beginning of his brilliant book *Growing a Revolution – bringing soil back to life*. 'If this was true, you might assume that governments around the world would race to embrace it. Well, there is, and they aren't. Not yet anyway.

'Why not? Because the solution challenges a century of conventional wisdom and powerful commercial interests, and requires a profound shift in how we think about and treat the least glamorous resource of all – the soil beneath our feet.'

Montgomery has helped form my understanding of soil and how we can restore it to health, although my journey started with a Netflix documentary called *Kiss the Ground*. This very watchable documentary explains that a way forward with climate change lies in the soil, which we gardeners treasure and cultivate.





INSTAGRAM: CHARLES_DOWDING

Charles Dowding demonstrating use of cardboard.

Complex inter-relationships

So, what can we do this year to help improve our soil and so our gardens? Let's start with a closer look at what is going on in the soil. When plants photosynthesise, they take the very carbon dioxide causing climate change out of the atmosphere to make sugars, which they use to grow leaves, stems, woody trunks and make nectar. A whopping one third of those sugars are sent to their roots, which they exude into the soil. If your soil is even half-way healthy, it is full of mycorrhizal fungi and beneficial bacteria directly fed by the plants. In this way the carbon becomes part of the food cycle in the soil, with billions of organisms feeding on it.

But it is not a one-way street. In return for being 'fed', mycorrhizal fungi – which formed a symbiotic relationship with plants before the time of the dinosaurs – extract nutrients (phosphorus, nitrogen, potassium and all the rest) along with water from the soil and feed this back to the plant. Meanwhile, once in the soil, much of the carbon remains locked away in the form of humus, which, as every gardener knows, is amazing at retaining water and is full of goodness… until it is ploughed or tilled, at which point the carbon is released back into the atmosphere and the mycorrhizal fungi are broken up into tiny pieces.

While this is a simplification of a complex process, there are steps we can take as gardeners to reinstate the health of our soils and, in doing so, create healthier plants better able to withstand pests, diseases and drought and produce crops that are fuller of key nutrients. Oh, and we're doing our bit with carbon draw-down.

No-dig planting

Digging over your kitchen garden and borders is necessary to remove weeds and prepare for planting… or is it? Instead, consider the no-dig method: less work weeding while feeding soil organisms. This works for flower borders and veggie gardens, and curiously you end up with lovely crumbly soil. You can prepare ground any time, even in winter. The method is simple: just mulch the soil and keep mulching.

Mulch can be any covering material (ideally biodegradable) that excludes light from weeds; dish it around the base of perennials and shrubs. I now heavily mulch my borders. In my kitchen garden, I dealt with a bad case of creeping buttercup and bind weed by first laying down overlapping brown cardboard boxes (free from the supermarket with tape and staples removed), covered with 10cm of compost, which I firmed by treading it down with my feet.

The cardboard stops light reaching the grass and weeds, which eventually die and rot down, keeping all the carbon where it belongs, in the soil. The cardboard also breaks down to become part of the new soil structure.

Give yourself a cardboard edge, weighing down the edges with recycled bricks or logs to stop the perennial weeds creeping back in from the sides. Some weeds will poke through again and again, and again. Just dig up what you can reach through the compost, cover the area with another piece of cardboard and replace the compost. Meanwhile leaving soil covered and undisturbed like this helps to suppress weed growth because many seeds need light to germinate. It is not an overnight success like poisoning (*please*, just don't!) but it does come right with time.

You can use your own compost or buy in mushroom compost or well-rotted manure. Or you can buy compost made from local waste in 20 litre bags, hippo bags or by the lorry load from people like Hills Waste Solutions (www.hills-waste.co.uk/buy-compost). The trick is not to leave soil (or even compost) exposed – nature abhors bare earth. So, if you have a patch that you want to leave unplanted, sow some wild flowers into it.

There are loads of videos on YouTube to get you going with No Dig. Eg: https://bit.ly/wl2302nodig.

Next month we look at how we can improve water retention in soil. WL

- *Sophie Butcher is the beekeeping garden designer based in Chippenham. www.hithergardendesigns.co.uk*

Plants for soil compaction and weed suppression

One of the keys to soil preservation is protecting it from the sun. Almost any plant will help do this simply because it shades the soil from the sun while developing those vital mycorrhizal fungal and bacterial inter-relationships. However, there are some plants for specific jobs that also look good in flowerbeds. Two key jobs are reducing soil compaction – using plants with deep roots to help break up the soil without digging – and weed suppression. Here are four drought-tolerant suggestions.

Achilleas (yarrow) are a great source of food for beetles, butterflies and bees. Mining bees are particularly partial to them, while the wool carder bee will line its nest with plant hairs gathered from the leaves and stems. Suitable for all soils except waterlogged or acidic soils, you can find achillea in a wide range of lovely colours from white to yellows, reds, oranges, pinks and purples.

Calendula officinalis (marigold) is well-loved by pollinators and looks fabulous planted in blocks in borders and also between rows in the vegetable garden to attract beneficial insects. Meanwhile, experts at Newcastle University's School of Natural and Environmental Sciences have found that marigolds release a chemical called limonene, which is the main component responsible for repelling tomato whiteflies – formally confirming what gardeners have known for ever.

Cichorium intybus (chicory) flowers from June to late summer and attracts honey bees and bumblebees. Sow in spring or early autumn in warm soil (frost hardy). The stems can become woody with age if you don't cut them. Great for attracting gold finches to the garden in the autumn because they like the seeds.

Petroselinum crispum (parsley) has yellow umbel flowers in summer which are another good source of food for pollinators. Sow in spring or autumn (it survives snow and frost) after soaking the seeds overnight in a glass of water (avoid seed trays; it hates having its roots disturbed). Not suitable for acid soils.

All available from www.sarahraven.com.

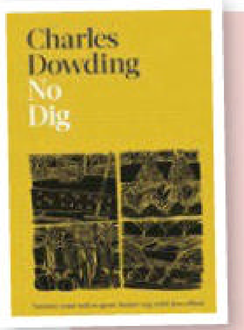
PHOTOGRAPHY © JONATHAN BUCKLEY

Stuff to do in February

- Mulch everything.
- Consider what you buy carefully. For instance, Yeo Valley Organic uses regenerative farming methods.
- For a good read consider *Growing a Revolution – bringing soil back to life* by David R Montgomery, which explains the environmental crossroads at which we stand and shows us potential solutions.
- Watch *Kiss the Earth* on Netflix – a good documentary that will leave you feeling that climate change is not all doom and gloom and that there is a workable way forward.
- Cut back shrubs grown for their colourful winter stems, such as Cornus and Salix cultivars, as the leaf buds start to swell. To avoid missing out on Cornus flowers and berries that form on second-year growth, take out one third of the oldest branches down to their bases. This will stimulate the growth of bright new stems for the following winter.
- Another job for this month, after flowering, prune winter-flowering jasmine (Jasminum nudiflorum) to within three fingers of the old wood. This will encourage strong, healthy shoots and improve flowering.

Settle down with a good book

Here is a selection of books suggested by The Corsham Book Shop to tide you over the last cold dark days and to help you look forward to the warmer days to come.

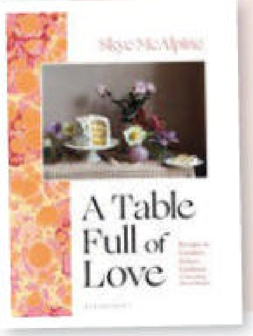


No Dig by Charles Dowding

If you are looking forward to getting back into your vegetable patch, this could be the perfect book to inspire you and help you embrace the 'no dig' gardening revolution. Charles Dowding is an expert on no-dig, and the book explains how to nurture your soil and help maintain the enormous web of organisms that support life.

Dorling and Kindersley £30.00 ISBN: 9780241541814

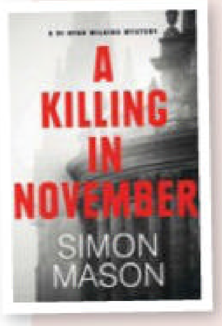
A Table full of Love: Recipes to Comfort, Seduce, Celebrate & Everything in Between by Skye McAlpine



Food has an amazing power to comfort and bring people together, and in this new book Skye McAlpine has gathered a selection of recipes which really do show love. The book divided into the sections Comfort, Seduce, Spoil, Nourish & Cocoon. Whether you are cooking for a broken-hearted friend, cooking to seduce, gathering friends around a special meal or birthday cake, this is food as a way of showing people you care about them.

Bloomsbury £26.00 ISBN: 9781526657367

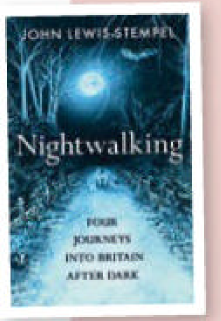
A Killing in November by Simon Mason



This is a real page-turner! Ryan Wilkins grew up in a trailer park; he is now a detective inspector, filled with disgust for privileged elites - but he does notice things. His professional partner is DI Ray Wilkins, an affluent impeccably groomed, smooth-talking Oxford graduate. You wouldn't think they would get on. They don't. But when a young woman is found strangled, they're forced to. The relationship between the two detectives is beautifully developed, and it's brilliantly plotted and very funny.

Quercus £9.99 ISBN: 9781529415704

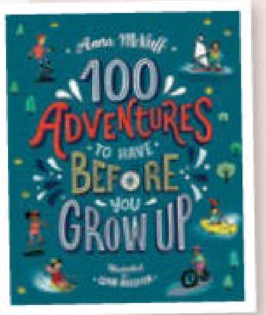
Nightwalking: Four Journeys into Britain After Dark by John Lewis Stempel



Stempel first became addicted to night walking as a teenager, when the only pub that would serve beer to a teenager was three miles away, so he had to walk there. But seeing barn owls cruise through the night air, and discovering the ways his other senses seemed to take on a new prominence led him to a lifelong habit of exploring his daytime landscapes at night.

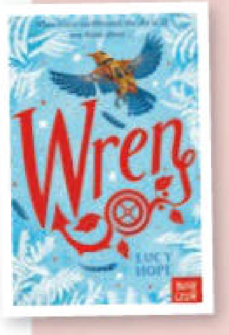
Doubleday £9.99 ISBN: 9780857529114

100 Adventures to Have Before You Grow Up by Anna McNuff



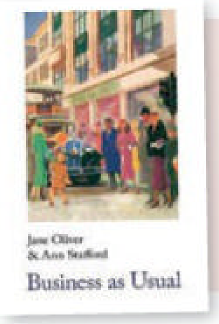
We love this - and even though we are grown up, we would still be up for the adventures. With this, you can get planning for the spring and summer ahead, and find some adventures - big and small - to have now. From building a den, to visiting a lighthouse. **Walker Books £9.99 ISBN: 9781406388633**

Wren by Lucy Hope



Here's something to tempt the younger reader. Wren lives in an ancient house on Anglesey which hides many secrets. Her mother died in a flying accident, and to prevent Wren from the same dangerous activity, her father wants to send her to the dreaded Anglesey Institution for the Rehabilitation of Young Women. But Wren won't be controlled: she is determined to fly and invent things and also to unearth her home's long-buried secret.

Nosy Crow £7.99 ISBN: 9781839947230



Business As Usual by Jane Oliver and Ann Stafford

This is the perfect novel to lift your spirits. A forgotten classic, first published in 1933 *Business as Usual* is a delightful illustrated novel in letters. It tells the story of Hilary Fane who moves from Edinburgh to London determined to support herself before marrying and becoming a house-wife. Funny and engaging her portrait of her colleagues and of London between the wars is astute and the underlying narrative engaging. **Handheld Press £12.99 ISBN: 9781912766185**

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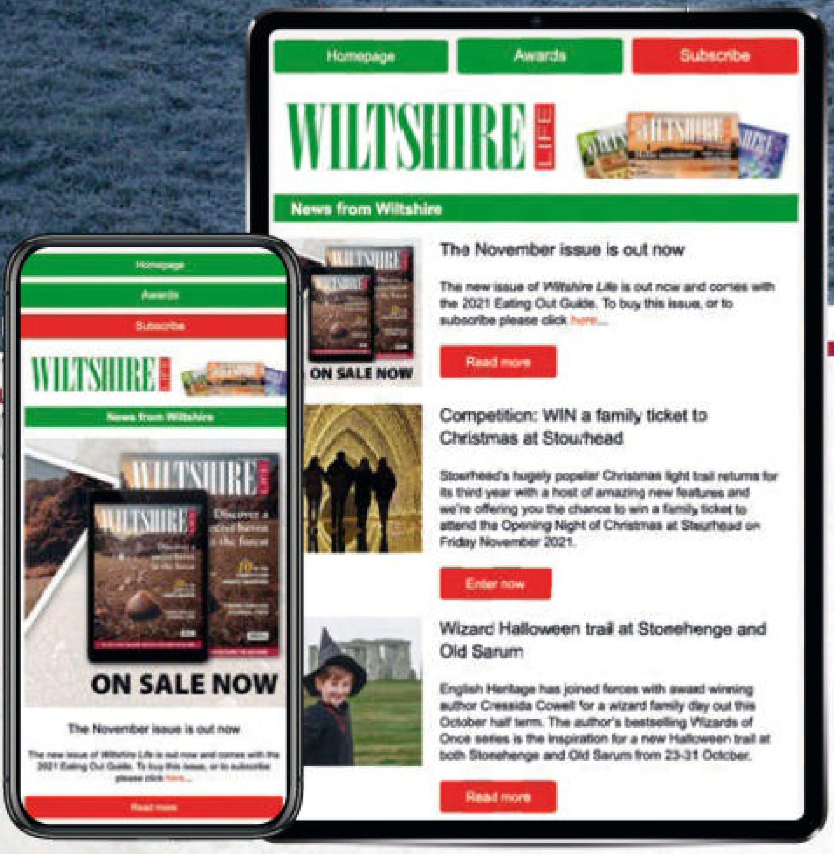

The November issue is out now

The new issue of *Wiltshire Life* is out now and comes with the 2021 Eating Out Guide. To buy this issue, or to subscribe please click here...

Competition: WIN a family ticket to Christmas at Stourhead

Stourhead's hugely popular Christmas light trail returns for its third year with a host of amazing new features and we're offering you the chance to win a family ticket to attend the Opening Night of Christmas at Stourhead on Friday November 2021.

Wizard Halloween trail at Stonehenge and Old Sarum

English Heritage has joined forces with award winning author Cressida Cowell for a wizard family day out this October half term. The author's bestselling Wizards of Once series is the inspiration for a new Halloween trail at both Stonehenge and Old Sarum from 23-31 October.

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